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DISCOURSES

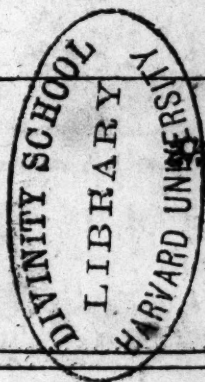
PREACHED AT THE

TEMPLE CHURCH.

By THO. SHERLOCK, D. D.

Late Master of the TEMPLE,
Now Lord Bishop of LONDON.

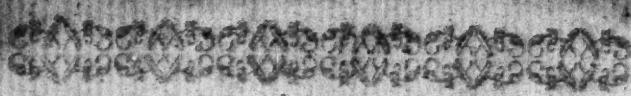
VOL. II.



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MDCCCLIX.



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And when this robe came down from Peter's shoulders
the brethren and I began to be circumcised after
the manner of Moses. And we were circumcised
the next day. And Paul and Barnabas were
circumcised with us. And Titus was not
circumcised. And we continued in Antioch
for many days. And Paul and Barnabas
continued in Antioch, and I went
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For I have been in Jerusalem for many days,
and have been in the temple, and have
been in the temple, and have been in the temple.

DISCOURSE III

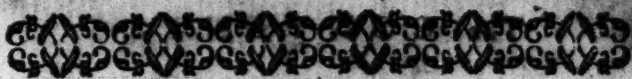
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and have been in the temple, and have been in the temple,
and have been in the temple, and have been in the temple.

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ACTS XV. I. 2.

And certain Men which came down from Judea, taught the Brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the Mannar of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small Dissention and Disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the Apostles and Elders, about this Question.

We learn from the Text, and other Parts of Holy Writ, That the earliest and purest Times of the Gospel were not free from Disputes and Controversies in Religion: That the Authority of the Apostles, tho' confirmed by Signs and Wonders, was not sufficient to lay the Heats and Prejudices of Men; which, like ancient Inhabitants, having Possession and Prescription to plead for

their Right, were with great Difficulty removed: That the Apostles themselves, however agreed in one and the same Doctrine, were of different Opinions as to the prudential Methods of dealing with the Opposition they found; some giving way to the Torrent, that Men might have Time to cool, and recover the Calmness of Reason and Judgment; others endeavouring resolutely to stem the Tide, and not to give way, *no, not for an Hour, that the Truth of the Gospel might continue.* Hence arose the Contest between *Peter* and *Paul*; so that, as the Apostle of the *Gentiles* himself tells us, *he withstood Peter to the Face.*

To the same Cause likewise we may ascribe much of the present Difficulty and Obscurity of the Books of the New Testament: For the Writers being necessarily drawn into Controversy by this Means, which always has, and in the Nature of the Thing must have, Reference to the Opinions and Prejudices of the Disputers; there are many Things in Scripture which appear dark to us, for want of a distinct Knowledge of the Errors and Misconceits which the Writers oppose; many Things delivered down to us, in which it is not easy, at first Sight, to distinguish how far the holy Penman argues upon the Truth of our common Christianity, and how far upon the Principles and Concessions of his Adversary. From whence it has come to pass, that some Things have been taught by unskilful Interpreters of Scripture, as the Doctrines of Christianity, which were no better than the Errors of Judaizing Converts.

These Difficulties, thus woven into the Holy Writings, have furnished even to learned Men constant Matter of Dispute and Controversy; and some Points have laboured under a Difference of Opinion in most Ages of the Church: And so far has Length of Time been from diminishing these Disputes, that every Writer

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Writer of Name and Authority has enlarged this Field of Controversy; and to examine, adjust, and expound the Sentiments and Opinions of Men of Renown in the Church of God, who have gone before us, is left as an additional Labour and Study, and oftentimes as a fresh Matter of Contention.

Add to these Causes already recited, the Passions, the Weaknesses and Prepossessions of Mind, which the best Men are not free from; and which darken and obscure Things in themselves oftentimes clear and intelligible; and you will have before you, perhaps, a just Account of the Causes which have filled the World with so many Doubts and Differences in Opinion concerning the weightiest Matters of Religion.

But since from this Account there appears little Hope of coming to an entire Harmony and Agreement of Opinion, what must an honest Man do? Whom shall he chuse to follow? And, when he has chosen, with what Security and Confidence can he proceed? since there will be always some to tell him, That he is a blind Follower of a blind Leader. How far this Difficulty has been pressed, even to the rendering all Religion precarious and uncertain, and to the discarding the Gospel itself, which is represented as encumbered with so many Doubts, such different Comments and Expositions, that the Wit of Man knows not how to extricate him from this Labyrinth, and lead him to one Spot of firm Ground, whereon to rest the Sole of his Feet; how far, I say, this Argument has been urged to this Purpose, I need not say: It will be more to our Purpose to call this Matter to a fair Examination, and to assert the Grounds and Principles of our Faith, notwithstanding this fierce Assault that has been made upon them.

Now there are two Things which this Argument leads us to consider; and which, when fairly stated, will, I think, exhaust the whole Difficulty.

The first is with respect to the Revelation itself; to consider how far these Difficulties affect the Authority of the Gospel: For if it is, as it is represented, so very dark and obscure, that common Honesty, with the Assistance of common Sense, cannot discern in it what is the Will of God; then it cannot be a Rule or Measure of Religion, or designed as such by God, who is too wise and too good to give Laws to the World, which can be of no Use to them, but to perplex and confound their Understandings.

The second is with respect to Ourselves, to consider how we may attain to a certain Rule of Religion under the Gospel Revelation, notwithstanding the many Controversies and Disputes, which are too visible to be denied, and oftentimes too fierce to be excused.

And if it shall appear upon the whole, that these Difficulties do not affect the Authority of the Gospel, nor preclude us from the certain Knowledge of the Faith and Obedience required under the Gospel; then, whatever Use may be made of these Controversies, they cannot in Reason be urged as Objections against Revealed Religion, the Certainty of which, either as to its Authority, or the Clearness of its Doctrines, is no way impeached by them.

The first Thing is, to consider the Authority of Revelation, and how it is affected by any Difficulties or Obscurities that are found in it.

The Authority of Revelation depends upon this, That it is the Will and Word of God; and he that knows he has the Word of God, knows that he has a Revelation of certain Authority. The first Question then is, Whether this Knowledge may be attained, be-

fore we have a distinct and explicit Understanding of all the Parts of the Revelation? If it may, then it is certain, that the Obscurity of some Parts of the Revelation cannot destroy the Authority of the whole. We know very well, in all ordinary Cases, that these are two very distinct Acts of Knowledge, and not in the least dependent upon one another; To know who spoke such Words; and to know the true Sense and Import of those Words. One Man may certainly know who spoke them, though he knows not the Meaning of them: Another may know the Meaning of them, without knowing who spoke them. In Revelation the Case is the same: Our Saviour spoke many Things in Parables, which the Disciples understood not, and which he afterwards explained to them. Now I would ask any Man, Whether the Disciples did not as certainly know that those Parables were the Word of Christ, before he explained them, as they did afterwards? If they did, those Parables were to them of the same Authority, though not of the same Use, when they were obscure, as when they were explained. In human Laws the Case is the same: The Authority of them depends not upon their being distinctly understood by all Men; for the Man, who has no Ability to expound a Statute, may yet be certain of its Authority, if he will have recourse to the proper Records. And there are many Statutes of this Realm, the Authority of which no Man doubts of, though, at the same Time, those who are best able to judge are not agreed in the Meaning and Exposition of them: And what would you think of a Man, who should affirm that we have no Statute-Book in this Kingdom, or none of any Authority; and give you this Reason for it, because that which we call our Statute-Book has many Difficulties and Obscurities in it, many Things which are not to be reduced to a cer-

tain and determinate Meaning? And yet the Argument is as good, nay, just the same, in this Case, as when it is applied to Revelation; and a Man argues with the same Shrewdness, who tells us we have no Gospel, or none that we ought to admit, because the Gospel we pretend to has many difficult Passages in it, many Things that are hard to be understood: For the Obscurity of some Laws is as good an Argument against the Authority of the Statute-Book, as the Obscurity of some Texts is against the Authority of the Gospel.

This will further appear to be true, if we consider the proper Proofs of a Revelation, and how they operate: For they will be found to take place, and have their full Effect upon the Mind, antecedently to our having a distinct Understanding of all the Parts of a Revelation: And consequently our not having a distinct Understanding of all the Parts of a Revelation is no Objection to the Authority of a Revelation, which is founded upon Proofs the Objection cannot reach. Now these Proofs are three: The Qualities of the Person who is sent to make the Revelation: The main End and Purpose of his Coming: And the Miracles which he gives in Evidence of his Commission. If the Person be sufficiently qualified to be entrusted with so great Charge; if nothing appears to make it justly suspected that he is a Deceiver; if no private Views, no Self-interest, no Ambition are discoverable; if he be in all Respects such an one as we may reasonably suppose God would make Choice of to send on his Errand: If the End and Design of his Coming is such as we may well suppose God to be the Author of; if it tends to promote the Honour of God, and true Religion, to secure the general Happiness and Welfare of Mankind, without any partial Views and Regards: If his Mission be attested by such Signs and Wonders, as plainly point out to us the
Hand

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Hand of God supporting and encouraging the Work; if they are openly shewn before Friends and Foes, and attended with such other Circumstances, as are necessary to place them above Suspicion: In this Case we have a certain Evidence of the Mission and Authority of this Person to make known to us the Will of God, and are bound to receive what he shall publish in God's Name, as the Law of God. Now all these Proofs we certainly may have, without being able to understand, or fully comprehend, all that such a Person delivers; and yet, in Force of these Proofs, we are bound to believe what he delivers to be the Word of God. Men do not speak accurately, when they say, the Doctrines are proved by Miracles; for, in truth, there is no Connexion between any Miracles and Doctrines: Miracles prove the Authority of the Person, and the Authority of the Person is the Ground of receiving the Doctrine. Now it is one Thing to know the Authority of the Person, another Thing to know what he says. His Authority makes what he says to be Law, and your Want of Knowledge in the Meaning of what he says will not unmake the Law: For if it could, Ignorance would be the supreme Authority, since no Authority could make a Law, which Ignorance could not repeal. How far we are concerned in these Obscurities, or what Obligations they lay upon us, which perhaps may be none at all, is another Question: But I think it is evident, that no Body of Laws, human or divine, becomes void and of none Effect, because some Parts are hard to be understood, or not to be understood. And if Men dispute upon such Places, and divide into a thousand Opinions about them, such Divisions do still less affect the Law, which owes not its Authority to the Agreement or Disagreement of Interpreters.

But it may be said, and I think very justly, To what Purpose is any thing delivered as Law, or Revelation, which is too obscure to be understood? The very End of the Law is, to be the Rule of our Actions; and how is this End to be attained, whilst we continue ignorant of the Meaning of the Lawgiver? Men may blunder, and make dark Laws, and so miss the Scope they aimed at; and the Wonder is not great: But how should any Obscurity darken the Law of God? since we cannot but suppose, from the very End and Nature of a Law, that his Intention was to be understood; and his Wisdom permits us not to doubt but that he was able to explain his Meaning.

This brings us to consider the Fact, Whether the Gospel has such Difficulties and Obscurities in it, as may make us esteem it unworthy of the Wisdom of God.

The Christian Revelation is contained in the Books of the New Testament; but they are not all of the same Kind, nor do they fall under the same Consideration in this Question. Had Men given themselves Time to think coolly, and to make the true Separation in this Case, we had not perhaps been told; that the Difficulties of some Parts of the Scripture are an Objection to the Revelation itself.

The Books of the New Testament may be considered either as Historical, as Doctrinal, or as Controversial, and some as a Mixture of the two last. By the Historical, I understand the Narrative of our Saviour's Life and Death, and of the Preaching of his Apostles after his Resurrection and Ascension. These, as they are merely Historical, afford none of those Difficulties which are so much complained of: The Story is plain and simple, and the different Accounts of it, in the several

veral Gospels, vary no more from each other, than may naturally be expected from different Pens.

By the Doctrinal, I understand those Matters of Faith, and Rules of Duty, which do not regard this or that particular Case, but were intended for the Use of the whole World, and are to continue to the End of it. And if there be a clear Law, and clearly expressed, in the World, this is the Law. Can Words more clearly express the Honour and Worship we are to pay to God, or can more familiar Directions be given in this Case, than are to be found in the Gospel? Is not Idolatry clearly condemned in the Gospel? Is there any other Thing relating to divine Worship, that we yet want instructing in? Are not the Duties likewise, which we owe to each other, made evident and plain, and can there be any Dispute about them, except what arises from Lust, or Avarice, or other Self-interest? As to the peculiar Benefits of the Gospel, are they not declared without Obscurity? Can you read the Gospel, and doubt whether Christ died for you; whether God will grant Pardon to the Penitent, or his Assistance to those who ask it; whether he will reward all such in Glory, who continue the faithful Disciples of his Son? What other Revelation do we want, or can we desire, in these great and weighty Concerns? Or, what is there wanting to make up a complete System of Religion? These Things you read in the Gospels, these Things you read in the other Writings of the Apostles; in these there is a perfect Harmony and Consent of all the inspired Writers.

But still, you say, there are Difficulties in Scripture. And so there are: But they are such as do not interfere with the clear Revelation made by Christ. The Controversial Parts of Scripture, such I mean as combat the particular Opinions and Errors of the Jews or others, are in many Places dark, and hard to be understood:

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But had there never been any Dispute with the *Jews* or others, had all obeyed without Dispute, the Gospel had been perfect; and is perfect still, however Divines, or others, may differ in expounding the Particulars incident to those Debates. Had *St. Paul* said nothing of Election or Reprobation (and, as these Terms are generally understood, nothing perhaps he has said) our Gospel had not been less complete; since these Points, however understood, make no Alteration in our Duty, and they ought to make none in our Faith. It was a proper Part of the Apostles' Office to root out the Prejudices and Errors which stood in the Way of the Gospel of Christ; and whilst they were disputing with *Jew* and *Gentile*, and proving that Jesus is the Christ, they were doing the Work of their great Master. These Writings, conveyed down to us, are of inestimable Value, and worth our utmost Pains and Study to understand, being Transcripts of that Wisdom with which the Apostles were endowed. They contain the great Doctrines, and the great Proofs, of Christianity; in which Points they are not only of the greatest Authority, but have likewise the greatest Clearness: The particular Disputes which are intermixed refer often to Principles and Opinions, which we can hardly, at least not surely, discover; and when Men apply Things pointed to one single View by the Apostles, which View they have no clear Sight of, to the general Doctrines of Christianity, no wonder if they disturb the Whole, and spread Confusion over the clearest Parts of the Gospel.

To this Conduct have been owing many of the Disputes which have perplexed the World; and Men have forgot the plain Parts of Scripture, while, to the utter Ruin of Christian Charity, they have worried one another about the obscure ones. To give one Instance of this:

this: If there be any Thing plain in any Book in the World, this is plain in Scripture, *That without Holiness no Man shall see God.* This is the Foundation of all Religion, the Ground upon which the Revelation itself is built; and yet who is there that wants to be informed, that Doctrines destructive of this great Article have been advanced upon the Authority of Scripture? Who has not heard that good Works are not necessary to Justification? and heard St. Paul quoted for a Voucher! not where he is delivering the general Doctrines of Christianity, but where he is beating down the particular Mistakes of his Countrymen. As to these Parts of Scripture, happy is he who understands them, for he shall discover much of the Wisdom and Justice of God in his Dealings with his ancient People, the People of the *Jews*: But he that understands them not, has this Comfort, That his Salvation, his Religion, depends not upon any Controversy that concerned the *Jews* only, but upon the plain Declarations of God made to all Mankind.

Thus much may serve to shew, how far the Difficulties and Obscurities, which really are found in the Holy Scripture, do affect the common Cause of Religion: And I think it is evident, that our common Religion stands clear even of these Difficulties.

Other Difficulties there are, which more properly belong to religious Men, than Religion: Such are the Disputes and nice Inquiries of the Schools, which often enter into the Debates of learned Writers. But it is strange to find these urged as Objections against the Gospel, by any sober-minded Man. For what are these Disputes to the Gospel? God has promised his Assistance to all who endeavour to serve him; is there any Difficulty in understanding this? Let the Schools consider the Nature of Grace, and how it influences the Mind,

and divide it into an hundred Sorts, what is that to the Gospel? or what is it to a Man who is assured that God will assist him, and who knows that God cannot want Means to make good his Promise?

In like Manner there are many Doubts about the Sacraments of the Gospel, and how and what Grace they confer: But, dispute as you will, this one Point is clear, *He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.*

Suppose this, you will say, to be true, and that these Doubts and Difficulties do not affect the Authority or Truth of the Gospel; yet they are so blended with the Cause of Religion, that they are not easily separated from it by unlearned and unskilful Men: And this at least renders the Gospel of little Use, since it is a Rule, the Straightness of which cannot be discerned by the Generality of Mankind. And this brings me to my second Head.

To consider these Difficulties with respect to Ourselves.

From what has been already said it is evident, That the Scriptures contain a plain and intelligible System of Religion: And would Men follow the Directions of what they do and may understand, and not think themselves under Direction of what they do not understand, there would be no great Difficulty in this Case. But the Misfortune is, that Men often fancy they understand what they do not, and raise Rules and Principles of Religion to themselves out of Places of which they are perfectly ignorant: And how can this be avoided? In the first place, It is at every Man's Peril, if he makes any Rule to himself, contrary to the plain express Commands of God which he does or may easily understand. In human Laws, the Main of the Subject's Duty is plain; and if he mistakes any dark Passages, yet so as to keep strictly to his known Duty, the Consequence

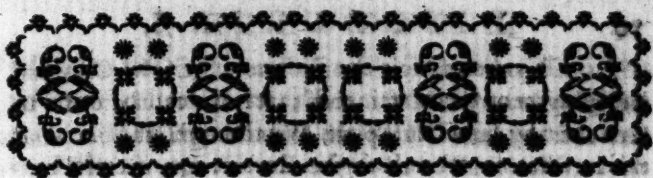
sequence perhaps may be tolerable, and he excusable : But if a Man from any dark Statute should infer a Right to rob and murder his Neighbour, and act accordingly (which Acts of Violence are plainly forbid in the Law) he ought to suffer, not for misunderstanding the obscure Law, but for transgressing the plain one. The same Reason holds as to the Divine Law : If a Man takes care to observe what he does understand, his Mistakes may not be dangerous ; but if he forms to himself a Liberty from the obscure Places, inconsistent with the plain intelligible Laws of the Gospel, and acts accordingly ; those plain Laws, which should have been his Rule, will be his Condemnation.

But plain Places are not equally plain to all Capacities ; and therefore even in this there may be a Latitude ; a Latitude which we cannot determine, but which God, who is to be the Judge, both can and will : And the great Difficulty which Men make to themselves in this Case, seems to me to arise from a Misapprehension of the Judgment of God. Among Men all are judged by the same Rule, one Law comprehends all, and is of the same Interpretation and Extent in all Cases. That it is so, is the Effect of human Weakness ; for in Truth and Equity, if we could come at them, no two Cases are perhaps exactly alike, or equally subject to the same Rule : But Men cannot allow for the different Capacities and Circumstances of Men, which they cannot judge of ; and therefore all who are esteemed to have Reason enough to govern themselves, are concluded under one Law ; and only Children, Ideots, and Madmen are excepted Cases. Though in truth the Degrees by which Men approach to Madness, or Folly, could they be limited, which they cannot, would deserve a distinct Consideration.

Now if you conceive the Judgment of God to be like the Judgment of Man, and that all shall be tried by one and the same Rule; no Wonder you ask, how ignorant Men shall come to the Knowledge of their Duty under the present Doubts and Difficulties which cloud Religion.

But the Truth is this; God, who gave all Men one Law, gave every Man that Share of Reason which he enjoys: Fools are capable of receiving no Law; and no Man is further capable than in Proportion to the Degree of Reason which God has given him: And consequently, in Truth and Equity, the Law is no further a Law to him, than his Reason is capable of receiving it. And since Reason comes as much from God, as the Law itself; it is wrong to imagine that the true Sense of the Law is the only and the single Rule by which God will judge: Since it is evident in Equity and Justice, That the Sentence on every Man must arise from the complex Consideration of the Law, that was before him, and the Degree of Reason, which he had to apply it.

This great Difficulty therefore, I beseech you, trust with God; and doubt not but that the righteous Judge of the World will do righteously.



DISCOURSE II.



EPHESIANS ii. 18.

*For through him we both have an Access by one Spirit
unto the Father.*

THESE Words, rightly understood, will give us a distinct Conception of the Nature of the Christian Religion, as it stands distinguished from all others, whether Natural, or pretending to Revelation. All Religions pretend to give Access to God, by instructing Men in what Manner to approach him by Prayer and Supplication: How to please him, and obtain his Favour and Protection, by such Works as each Religion accounts to be holy and acceptable to God: And how to reconcile ourselves to him, after having offended him by our Transgressions, through Sorrow and Repentance, or such other Means as have been devised and instituted as effectual to this End. But the Access to God, which the Gospel opens to us, is to be had only under the Guidance and Direction of God's Holy Spirit, and in the Name, and through the Mediation, of God's own

Son. This Access is the only one which the Christian Religion knows any thing of; for we cannot come to God, but by his Holy Spirit, and through his Son: And this is what no other Religion does or can pretend to.

The End of all Religion is manifestly this, To please God by serving him according to his Will, in order to obtain of him Happiness in this World and in the next: For the Belief that God is the Governor of the World, and the Giver of every good Thing, is the Foundation of all the religious Worship and Honour which are paid to him. All Religions being thus far the same, they differ when they come to prescribe the Method, and to appoint the proper Means by which God is to be served and applied to.

Two Things there are, which must necessarily be regarded in the Choice and Appointment of these Means; the Holiness and Majesty of God, and the Nature and Condition of Man: For unless the Means prescribed are such as are suitable to the Holiness and Majesty of God, he can never be pleased by them; for whatever is contrary to his Holiness, or injurious to his Majesty, must ever be an Abomination to him. On the other hand, The Means of Religion must likewise be adapted to the Use of Man, must be such as he can practise, and such as, his present Condition considered, will enable him to serve God acceptably; for without this, how proper soever the Means may be in themselves, yet they can be of no Use or Service to him.

If we examine all the Schemes of Religion which either prevail in those Parts of the World where the Gospel is unknown, or which are set up in Opposition to the Gospel where it is known, we shall find that they split upon one or other of these Rocks. The Gentile Religion is inconsistent with the Holiness of God, as mixing impure Rites and Ceremonies with its Worship;

and

and allowing the Practice of such Vices as even Nature abhors: It is injurious likewise to his Majesty, as dividing the Honour, which is due to him alone, among the Creatures; teaching Men to pay religious Worship to those who by Nature are not Gods. On the other side, Natural Religion, which seems to be the most growing Scheme, and is set up in Opposition to the Gospel, taking its Rise from the Purity and Holiness of God's Nature, and the essential Difference of Good and Evil, prescribes a Worship pure and holy; but it prescribes it to Men who have lost their Purity and Holiness, and are no longer able to perform the rigorous Conditions: It requires Brick without allowing Straw; exacting of Men, in their present degenerate State, the Purity and Holiness of uncorrupted Reason and Nature: It affords no Strength or Assistance to Men, to secure against Sin; and when they have sinned, it cannot give them any certain Assurance of Pardon and Forgiveness: So that Men, not being able to perform its Conditions, and having no Security of the Mercy of God without performing them, can have no settled Peace or Satisfaction in it.

From these two Considerations plainly appears the deplorable Condition of Mankind without the Interposition of God by a new Revelation of himself to the World: For, after the utmost Efforts that you can make to frame a Religion in all Respects proper, you will still find that it will be defective in one or other of these Respects. If you require such Degrees of Holiness from Men, as may render their Service acceptable to the holy God, you will require what they cannot perform; and thereby preclude them of any Access to him: Or, if you consult the present Powers of Men, and require no more Righteousness, than they by their Strength can arrive at; if you indulge the Passions which

which you cannot correct, if you allow the Vices you cannot reform, if you tolerate the Infirmities which you cannot remove: By thus adapting Religion to the Condition of Men, you will render it too impure to be accepted by God, who *is of purer Eyes than to behold Iniquity*; and the Communication between Heaven and Earth will still be shut up against all such who *hold the Truth in Unrighteousness*.

The Christian Religion alone has effectually provided against both these Cases: It requires a Worship spiritual, pure, and holy; its Laws are just and righteous, but abate nothing of the strictest Rules of Reason and Morality; it exacts from us not only an outward Obedience and Conformity in our Actions, but it searcheth the very Heart and Reins, and requireth *Truth in the inward Parts*; it restrains every dissolute Thought of our Minds, and every inordinate Desire of our Hearts. On the other side, that the gracious Purposes of God may not be defeated by the Weakness and Infirmary of Men, it has provided proper Remedies for every Want: It has brought down from Heaven the Pardon of God to all the Sins of Men, which was sealed with the Blood of its great Author, the ever-blessed Son of God: It has reconciled us to our offended Father, and conferred on us anew the Spirit of Adoption: It has put us under the Direction of the Holy Spirit, who is our Fellow-Labourer in the Work of God, and who so effectually helpeth our Infirmities, that *when we are weak, then are we strong*; who is our Stay in Prosperity, and our Support in Adversity, and the undivided Companion of our spiritual Warfare, leading us through Christ to God, who is the End of all our Hopes. And, as it has thus strengthened and enabled us to draw near to God, so has it likewise as effectually secured our Access to him, through Christ, who *sitteth at the right Hand of God*.

God, to make continual Intercession for us; to offer up, and by himself to perfect, all our Prayers and Praises, before the Throne of God; to supply all our Wants, to confirm our Faith, to strengthen our Virtue, and to make our Repentance available to the Remission of our Sins; and, at the last, if we perform the Conditions on our Part, to receive us into the Kingdom of his Father for ever.

The Use I would make of the Text, and of what has been already discoursed on it, is to observe to you,

First, That these Means of Salvation, which the Christian Religion has provided, were necessary to the Life of the World, the State and Condition of Man considered.

Secondly, That these Means being necessary, it was likewise necessary to reveal to Mankind the Doctrine concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit; and that the Belief of these Doctrines is necessary to every Christian, as far as the right Use of the Means depends upon the right Faith and Belief of the Doctrines: For, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, that whoever comes to God, must believe that He is; so likewise, whoever comes to God through Christ, in the Spirit, must believe that the Spirit is the Spirit of God and of Christ, and able to direct him; that Christ is the Son of God, and able to bring him to his Father. And by this Means shall we be able to justify to ourselves the Wisdom and Goodness of God in revealing this wonderful Knowledge to Men, inasmuch as he did it, not to impose arbitrarily upon their Faith and their Understanding, but in order to perfect and render effectual their Salvation.

First, I would observe to you, That these Means of Salvation which the Christian Religion has provided, namely, the Assistance of the Spirit, and the Mediation

of the Son; were necessary to the Life of the World, the State and Condition of Man considered.

I would not here be understood to affirm, That these Means were so absolutely necessary in themselves, that God could not by any other Method save the World. The Wisdom and the Ways of God are infinite and unsearchable: We cannot, and therefore ought not to pretend to set Bounds to them. To inquire, in what other Way God might possibly have saved Mankind, will neither make us wiser in this World, nor happier in the next.

What I would then be understood to mean, is this; That the Condition of Man before the Coming of Christ was such, that he could not, by the Help of Reason and Nature, so apply himself to God, as to be secure of his Pardon and Mercy; but there was a Necessity of providing other Means besides those of Reason and Nature, which no one could provide but God alone: That he has provided us with the Assistance of his Holy Spirit, and appointed his own Son for our Redeemer and Mediator. Some Means being therefore absolutely necessary to be provided, and these being the Means made choice of by God; we may safely affirm, without prying too far into the hidden Mysteries of God, That these Means were necessary to the Salvation of the World.

The Truth of this Proposition thus limited, is that which does most plainly shew us the Reasonableness of the Gospel, and the Wisdom and Goodness of God in the Revelation of it: For, suppose the contrary to this to be true, That Men were able of themselves to do the whole Will of God, and so to apply to him as to engage his Favour and Mercy, and to obtain Salvation for themselves at his Hands; and you will find it very hard to account for the Reasonableness of the Christian Religion,

Religion, which provides preternatural Assistances to enable us to do that which Nature can do without them; or for the Wisdom of God, in making the Revelation to serve those Ends which Men knew how to accomplish without it. But, if you consider Man in the State under which the Scripture represents him before the Coming of Christ, lost to God and to himself, the Slave of Passion, and the Servant of Sin, equally unable to govern himself, and to serve his Maker; you will then see the Want there was of a Mediator to be the Ambassador of our Peace, and to reconcile us to God; you will then see the Want there was of the Holy Spirit's Influence to enable us to subdue those unruly Passions and Appetites, which were a Partition Wall between us and our God; that we might serve our Maker in Spirit and in Truth, and *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God.*

Give me Leave to stay here a little to represent to you the Oeconomy of God in the Gospel Dispensation, which the Apostle, in the Text, has shut up in few Words; *We have Access to God, thro' Christ, by the Spirit.* To give you a distinct Conception of this, and of the different Offices of the Son and of the Spirit, you must conceive the Spirit of God as always present with us; the Son, as always in the Presence of the Father. The Spirit dwells with the Faithful, to guide and to direct them, to second and encourage all their good Desires, to help them in overcoming their Infirmities; in a word, to labour together with them in the Work of their Salvation, to make their Calling and Election sure. The Son of God is at the right Hand of the Majesty on High; there he is our Advocate, he intercedes for us, he receives and offers up our Prayers, he obtains for us the Remission of our Sins in Virtue of the one Oblation which he once made of himself upon the Cross;

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the Memorial of which is ever in the Sight of God. This will teach us what it is, to *have Access by the Spirit, through Christ*. For the Spirit abideth with us, he is at our right Hand, and by his happy Influence it is, that we draw near to Christ, and by him approach to the Father. The Son is our High-Priest, clothed with Majesty and Power, and seated at the right Hand of God, able to save all who will come to him; through whose powerful and always prevailing Mediation and Intercession the Way is opened to Pardon and Reconciliation. The Spirit is our Comforter, given us to dwell and to abide with us; to be a Principle of new Life within us, to quicken our mortal Bodies; that, dying to Sin, we may live unto God through Holiness. To draw Men to God is the Work of the Spirit, who therefore resides and dwells with Men: To reconcile God to Man is the Work of our High-Priest, who lives in the Glory of God, making continual Intercession for us.

And now, consider the calamitous Condition of Mankind under what View you please, you will always find a proper Remedy provided by the Mercy of God. If you reflect upon the Holiness of God, and his Hatred of Sin and Iniquity, and begin to fear that he can never be reconciled to Sinners; take Courage, the Work is difficult, but the Son of God has undertaken it, and how great soever the Distance between God and you is, yet through the Son you may have Access unto him. If still you fear for yourself, that all may again be lost through your own Weakness, and Inability to do good; even here Help is at Hand, the Spirit of God is your Support, he is the Pledge and Earnest of your Redemption. But,

Secondly, These being the necessary Means of Salvation, it was likewise necessary to reveal to the World the

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the Doctrines concerning the Son, and the Holy Spirit: And the Belief of these Doctrines is necessary to every Christian, as far as the right Use of the Means depends upon the right Faith and Belief of the Doctrines.

He that hath the Son, says St. John, hath Life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not Life: And again, Whosoever denieth the Son, hath not the Father. For since we can only come to the Father through the Son, to deny the Son, is to cut off all Communication between us and the Father. The same may be said of the Blessed Spirit, through whom we are in Christ: *If any Man, says St. Paul, have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:* Our blessed Lord has himself told us, *That this is eternal Life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.*

When we were to be put under the Conduct of the Spirit, and all our Hopes depended upon our Obedience to, and Compliance with, his holy Motions; was it not necessary to inform us who this Spirit is? to let us know, that he is sufficient to the Office allotted him; that, knowing perfectly the Mind of God, even as the Spirit of a Man knoweth the Things of a Man, he is able fully to instruct us and to direct us in the Ways of God; that, being infinite, and unconfined in Time or Place, he is equal to the extensive Charge committed to his Care, and can be ready at all Times, and in all Places, to succour the faithful Servants of God; that, being the Spirit of Power and of Might, he is able to rescue us out of all Dangers, and protect us against all the Powers and Principalities of the Kingdom of Darkness. It may be hard perhaps to human Reason to conceive, that this Holy Spirit is the eternal Spirit of God, and so intimately united with God, as to know the Mind of God as perfectly, as the Spirit of a Man which is in him knoweth the Mind of Man; but it would

would be harder still to believe, that the Spirit could do what is ascribed to him in Scripture, without believing him to be this great and glorious Person. It is a more rational Act of Faith, to expect from the eternal Spirit of God the Sanctification of our Souls and Bodies, spiritual Aid and Assistance in all our Trials and Temptations, and whatever else is necessary to our Salvation; than it would be to expect the same Things from any other Spirit, of whose Power and Attributes we knew nothing. The Power and Mightiness of the Spirit, made known to us by God, is a reasonable, a just Foundation for the Hope and Confidence we have in him; but, were we ignorant of his Power, our Trust in him would be without Ground; and we should lose this Boasting, which is now the Glory of our Faith, *That we know in whom we have believed.* Since therefore, by the determinate Counsel of God, the Redemption of the World was to be the Work of his Son; and the Sanctification of it, the Work of his Spirit; he has dealt with us more like reasonable Creatures, in declaring to us the Dignity and Power of the Persons in whom we are to trust; than he would have done, had he required of us the same Faith and Reliance on those Persons, without declaring to us how able and powerful they are to help us. If therefore it be reasonable for God to save the World, by redeeming it by his Son, by sanctifying it by his Holy Spirit, it cannot be unreasonable for him to make known his Son and his Spirit to the World, that all Men every-where may by the one Spirit of God, and through the only Son of God, approach to the Father. And this shews how foolishly Men charge God, when they complain of the heavy Imposition laid upon their Faith and their Understanding by the Gospel Doctrines concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit. God has revealed this for our Sakes
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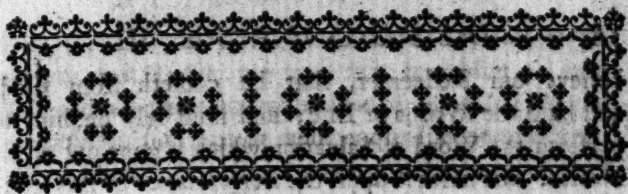
only, not for Matter of Speculation, or for the enlarging of our Knowledge; but that, having a reasonable Ground of Assurance and Hope in him, we may, thro' Faith, and patient Abiding, inherit the Promises.

You see now what every Christian has to expect and hope for from the Assistance of the Spirit, and Intercession of the Son of God. We all were Strangers to God, and Children of Disobedience; we are now reconciled to God, and can approach him as our loving Father. Having thus Access to the Father, our All depends on the Use we make of this great Privilege. By having Access to God, we are not placed in a State of Security, but in a State of Probation: We are received as prodigal Sons come home; if we continue obedient, we may hope for the Inheritance; but, if we turn Prodigals again, our Case will be desperate. This is the Condition of Christians. The Scripture has told us what our present State is; but, as to our future State, that depends upon our obeying, or not obeying, the Commands of God. And those who look for further Security, and expect to be ascertained what their future State will be, do very much impose upon themselves, and ascribe to the Holy Spirit an Office, of which the Scripture knows nothing. God has done, and will do, great Things for you; let not this make you vain and presumptuous, but let it excite your Care, that the Gift of God may not be bestowed on you in vain; and always bear in Mind the Apostle's Advice, *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.* Some imagine, that God's working with us is a Reason why we should be confident and secure of our Salvation: But you see, Paul was of another Mind. He writes to those who certainly had the Spirit; for he tells them, that God did work in them both to will and to do: But

does he tell them that they were safe and secure, and out of all Danger? No, he says nothing like it; on the contrary, he calls upon them to fear and tremble, lest, having received so great a Gift, they should by their Negligence, as thinking themselves secure, forfeit all the Hopes of the Gospel.

God says, with respect to the old World, *My Spirit shall not always strive with Man*: The Case is the same under the Gospel. The Spirit of God works with us, but will not always strive with us; and therefore, whilst we may have the Help of God's Spirit, we must lay hold of the Opportunity, and work with him. And whoever considers this, will find he has great Reason to tremble and fear; for, if he loses the Opportunity of making the best Use of the Assistance of the Spirit when it is offered, he may lose the Spirit, and himself forever. Let us therefore work whilst we have the Light, and continually pray in the Words of our Church, *O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from us*.





DISCOURSE III.



EPHESIANS ii. 8.

For by Grace are ye saved, through Faith; and that not of yourselves: It is the Gift of God.

WE have here, in few Words, the Argument which St. Paul always insists on, when he has occasion to set forth the Kindness of God towards Mankind. Life and Immortality are the greatest Blessings that we have any Notion of; and these were brought to Light by the Gospel of Christ: Him God gave for a Redeemer to the World, *that whosoever believeth on him should not die, but have eternal Life.* And even that through Faith in him we are saved, is the Gift of God; for of ourselves we are able to do nothing. These Things are taught us in the Compass of the Text, *We are saved by Grace:* We had no Title or Claim to Salvation, but God of his own Good-will hath sent among us plenteous Redemption; and according to the Richness of his Mercy, and the great Love wherewith he loved us, hath, together with Christ, quickened us who were dead in Sins. The Condition of this Salvation on our Part is Faith; for we are saved by Grace *through Faith.* We must believe

believe our Redeemer, that he cometh from God, and hath the Words of Life; and must rely on him to perform the Word of Salvation which is gone out of his Mouth. But neither upon the Performance of this Condition can we say that our own Arm hath saved us, or that we have done any Thing towards perfecting our Redemption; for this Salvation through Faith, and this Faith, is *not of ourselves, it is the Gift of God.*

I shall discourse on this Proposition, That Faith is the Gift of God: First, I shall endeavour to shew what the Scripture Doctrine on this Head is; and, Secondly, shall suggest to you some Considerations proper to this Subject.

First then, Let us consider what the Scripture Doctrine on this Head is. The Faith which St. Paul speaks of in the Text is such a Faith as is effectual to Salvation; for it is the Faith through which, by Grace, we are saved: This Faith he asserts to be the Gift of God. There are different Significations of the Word *Faith* in Scripture: Sometimes it signifies barely an Assent of the Mind to the Revelations and Doctrines of the Gospel, grounded upon such Evidence as the Things were capable of. This Faith sometimes is merely the Effect of common Sense; for Men cannot help believing the Things they see. Sometimes this Faith is grounded on the necessary Deductions of Reason from common Principles; by this Means we arrive at the Knowledge of God: A Man of Reason can no more avoid believing the Existence of a First Cause, than a Man with Eyes can avoid thinking that there is a material World, in which he lives, But neither has this Assent of the Mind the true Nature of Faith in it; *Thou believest, says St. James, that there is one God; thou doest well; the Devils also believe, and tremble.* But neither of these Kinds of Faith being the Faith through which we are saved, you cannot say, that St. Paul asserts of these,

these, that they are the Gift of God; any farther than as Sense and Reason are his Gifts, by which we know these and all other Things: Nor do we teach that Nature and Reason cannot lead to the speculative Knowledge of divine Truths; for the Evidence of all divine Truth resolves itself ultimately into either Sense or Reason; which are the common Gifts of God to Mankind, by the Principles of which the Truth of all Things, depending upon the Deductions of Sense and Reason, may be proved and examined. From the Exercise of Reason we come to know God, and the essential Difference between Good and Evil; and by these Principles are enabled to judge of any Doctrine, whether it be agreeable to the pure and holy Nature of God; which is the first presumptive Argument for the Truth of any divine Revelation; that it is holy and pure, and such an one, as, were God to have given a Law to the World, he would have given: From Reason we learn the unlimited Power of God; and from Sense and Reason we know the limited Power of Man; and are enabled to distinguish between the Works which the Power or Policy of Man can perform, and the Works which can flow only from the unbounded Power of God: From hence we can judge of the positive Arguments of a divine Revelation, the Works and Miracles which are offered to the World in Confirmation of its Truth. Thus far the natural Gifts of Sense and Reason can carry us; but the Result is barely the Assent or Dissent of the Mind to the Things under Inquiry; which Assent alone is not the Faith through which we are saved.

But let it be observed, as to these first Rudiments of Faith, That though Reason and Knowledge may attain to them, yet the Exercise of Reason and Knowledge depends upon the Will and Inclination; which are not naturally much given to dwell upon the Subject of Religion, but are engaged in the Affairs and

Concerns of the World, and taken up in the Pursuit of present Pleasures and Enjoyments: That, were Men left to themselves, but few would arrive even to this Degree of Faith; not for Want of Understanding to discern, but for Want of Will to inquire after, the Things which make for their Salvation. Thus, at the first Preaching of the Gospel, all the worldly-minded Men, and generally all the great Men, were professed Enemies to our Saviour. No sooner did he appear to preach a new Doctrine, but they opposed him: Not that they had Time or Opportunity to examine his Pretensions; but this Presumption, that his Doctrine would thwart their Interest, and lessen their Power and Authority among the People, prevailed with them to endeavour to stifle and suppress this new Doctrine, before it spread to their Prejudice: In which they were evidently guided, not by Sense or Reason, but by a perverse Will and evil Disposition. And since Men cannot but know, from their natural Notions of Good and Evil, that any Revelation coming from a pure and holy God must cross their evil Designs and Affections, they cannot but lie under a great Indisposition to inquire after divine Truths, in which, as long as Lust and Passion have the Dominion over them, they can promise themselves but little Comfort or Satisfaction: So that, to enable Men fairly to examine the Truth of a divine Revelation, and to acknowledge it upon full and sufficient Evidence, there must be such a Disposition of Mind to receive whatever may appear to be the Will of God, as may enable them to be impartial Judges. This our Saviour requires of us, when he says, *If any Man will do the Will of God, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself;* that is, If any Man has so far got the Victory over his own Passions and Lusts, as to be ready to give himself

to the Direction of God's Will, whenever it may be made appear to him; this Man is in a right Disposition to receive the Truths of the Gospel, and to judge whether Christ be indeed the Prophet of the Most High. Now this Disposition is far from being natural to Man, according to the Nature Man has at present; and therefore thus to prepare and dispose Mens Minds to receive the Gospel, is the Work of the Spirit, and is ascribed to him constantly in Scripture, where there is Occasion to speak of it: *No Man*, says our Lord, *can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.* And again, *No Man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father*; that is, Unless the Father, by the Grace of his Spirit, inclines and disposes his Will to attend to the Words of Life, which I deliver. To the same Purpose he speaks in another Place, *He that is of God, beareth God's Word*; where, to be of God, is no more than to be of the Number of those who are disposed to obey God; for, if to be of God signifies any thing more, it will hardly leave any tolerable Sense for the Word. Our Saviour would not say, Those who obey God, will hear God's Word; which is saying, Those who obey God, will obey God: And therefore, to be of God, must signify no more than to be ready and disposed to receive the Will of God, by the Influence of his Grace. To be of God, and to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do the Will of God, are manifestly put to signify the same Thing, because the same Thing is affirmed of them. Our Saviour says, *No Man can come unto him, unless he be drawn of God*; and yet he says, *He that is of God will hear his Word*; and, in another Place, *If any Man is willing to do the Will of God, he shall know of his Doctrine*; and if so, then to be willing to do the Will of God must amount to the same

Thing with being of God, and being drawn by God. From whence it follows, that those who are willing to do his Will; that is, disposed to receive his Truth, are drawn by him; that is, All who are well disposed to receive the Faith of Christ, owe their Disposition to the Grace and Influence of God's Holy Spirit. Accordingly we read of *Lydia*, that *God opened her Heart to attend unto the Things which were spoken of Paul*; where, opening her Heart, can signify nothing but inclining her Will to attend to, and examine, the Truths of the Gospel, which were the Things spoken by *Paul*. And, as Faith is ascribed to this Disposition wrought by the Spirit of God, so the Want of Faith is ascribed to the contrary Disposition, where a Man is under the Power of Lust and Appetite, and possessed with the Love of this World and the Pleasures of it: *If our Gospel be hid*, says *St. Paul*, *it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them which believe not, lest the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should shine unto them.*

But, Secondly, Faith signifies likewise Trust and Reliance on God; and includes a confident Hope and Expectation, that God will perform his Promises made to us in his Son. It is described as an active Principle of Religion, influencing the Mind to Obedience to the Law of God. This is the Faith through which *we are saved*, and is affirmed by *St. Paul* to be *the Gift of God*: To this Faith we owe our Growth and Progress in all Kinds of Christian Graces and Virtues; this is the Foundation of them, and this it is that makes them acceptable to God, That they are done in Faith. That Faith is perfect which is attended with a good Conscience, *void of Offence towards God and towards Man*. These two *St. Paul* couples together in his Advice to *Timothy*, enjoining him to hold the Faith and a good Conscience,

science, which some having put away, concerning Faith have made Shipwreck: So that Faith cannot stand without a good Conscience; that is, it is no Faith which does not *purge the Conscience from dead Works, and perfect Holiness in the Fear of God.* Now all that Reason can do, is to assent or dissent to any Doctrine; but Obedience must come from the Will. Wicked Men often believe; but, like the Devils, they tremble at the Majesty of God, and do not love or delight in him, or seek to do his Will. Faith then is made up of the Concurrence of the Will and the Understanding. The Understanding is still the Rule to judge Truth by; but the Will is not the right Rule of Action, and therefore the Assistance of the Spirit, to induce the Will to follow the Understanding, is necessary in the perfect Work of Faith: And this Work is ascribed to the Spirit in Scripture. Our Saviour, speaking to his Disciples, tells them, *I am the Vine, ye are the Branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much Fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.* Christ abideth in his Members by his Holy Spirit; and therefore we are told, *that our Bodies are the Temples of the Holy Ghost.* So then our Saviour's Doctrine is, That without the Assistance of his Spirit we can do nothing, but with it we may bring forth Fruit. To bring forth Fruit, in the Phrase of Scripture, is to be obedient to the Laws of God, and to be employed in the Works of Righteousness: So that Faith cannot be perfected, or become the governing Principle of our Lives, without the Assistance of the Spirit, to subdue our Wills to the Law of Holiness. Faith in this Sense is reckoned among the Fruits of the Spirit, both in the Epistle to the *Galatians*, and in that to the *Corinthians*: *The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith.* So, in the Epistle to the *Philippians*, the Apostle tells

tells them, *It is given unto them in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his Sake*: Where the Apostle's Doctrine is manifestly this; that both to believe in Christ, and to suffer for Christ, are the Gifts of God through his Holy Spirit. I shall not multiply Quotations upon this Head, which lie ready to any diligent Inquirer's Search; but shall spend the Time that remains in suggesting to you some proper Observations on this Subject.

And, First, Our ascribing Faith to the Operation of the Spirit, does not make our Faith cease to be a reasonable Act of the Mind: And yet this Surmise is apt to affect Men; and they think it is for want of Reason to prove our Religion, that we require the Gift of Faith to make it go down. But the Case is far otherwise: The Apostle advises us, *always to be ready to give to every one that asketh it of us, a Reason of the Faith that is in us*; consequently, Reason and Faith, or Reason and the Gift of the Spirit, are consistent; or else it would not be possible for those who receive Faith by the Spirit, to give a Reason of the Faith that is in them. Besides, a Revelation sufficiently attested, that is, sufficiently proved to Reason, is presupposed to the Work of Faith; for the Gift of Faith administers no new Arguments for Religion: And therefore, if it be not a reasonable Religion before we have Faith, it cannot be so afterwards. The first Work of Faith upon the Minds of Men, as I proved by Comparison of several Parts of Scripture, is to dispose them to listen after and obey the Will of God. *Lydia's* Heart was opened by Grace; this did not make her, right or wrong, take up with the Apostle's Doctrine, but it is said, that *she attended to the Words that were spoken by Paul*. Now, the more you attend to a Thing that has no Reason in it, the less you will like it: Let the Spirit therefore supply the Grace of Attention in
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the greatest Measure; if there wants Reason or Evidence in the Things we attend to, Attention will serve no other Purpose than to shew us these Defects: So that this Gift of the Spirit neither influences the Reason of Man, nor the Reason of the Thing; consequently, this Gift of the Spirit is no ways inconsistent with Reason. So neither is that other Gift of the Spirit, by which we are disposed to a Readiness to obey the Will of God; for my being ready to obey the Will of God cannot make a Doctrine to be the Will of God, which is not the Will of God; or make me see Arguments to prove a Doctrine, where there are none: Consequently, let a Man be ever so ready to obey the Will of God, it cannot affect his Judgment in discerning what is the Will of God, or disturb the Exercise of Reason in searching for the Doctrine which does contain the Will of God. And therefore this Gift of the Spirit likewise leaves a Man free to examine the Proofs of Religion, and does not influence his Mind one way or other in judging the Truth: For a Man who is willing to do the Will of God must necessarily be very unwilling to do what is not his Will; and therefore will be very loth to take up with any Doctrine for the Will of God, which is not sufficiently proved to be so. This Grace therefore only puts him upon searching and examining the Pretences of Religion, upon the Exercise of Reason, to discern where Truth lies: And this, I suppose, will be allowed to be the most reasonable Thing a Man can do. Thus, you see, the Assent of the Mind to the Truth of Religion is an Act of Reason, and must be so notwithstanding the Gifts and Assistances of the Spirit. And as Reason is not disturbed by the Gifts of the Spirit, which are previous to the Assent of the Mind; so, I hope, it will not be thought it can be influenced by those that are consequent to it. Faith is not perfected but through Obedience.

dience. The Power to obey and to love God we ascribe to the Spirit. Now you cannot obey God, till you know what is the Will of God; therefore you must first judge of Religion, before this Gift can operate: And therefore this Gift cannot affect your Reason one way or other. After you have proved and consented to the Truth of the Gospel, it is highly reasonable you should obey it. But though Reason, upon due Application, can discern the Truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt Will: And therefore it is one Thing to judge with Reason, another Thing to act with Reason: And the Grace of Obedience is given us by the Spirit, that we may not only think, but act, like reasonable Creatures.

I do not remember that God ever promised to force or subdue our Reason to the Belief of the Gospel by his Spirit: If he had taken this Method, he might have saved the Trouble of working Signs and Wonders and Miracles, and all other Arguments might have been spared, which are only Appeals to Reason, and would have been needless, had the Spirit been given to particular Persons for the Conviction of their Minds. The Apostle often prays, in behalf of his Converts, *that God would enlighten their Minds and Understandings; that he would increase their Knowledge; that he would give them a right Judgment in all Things.* But I think it will be agreed, that the more enlightened a Man's Mind is, the larger the Compass of Knowledge and Understandings, and the better his Judgment is, the more acute he will be in distinguishing Truth from Falsehood; consequently, the better able to judge of Religion, and the less ready to receive it without sufficient Evidence, that is, without Reason.

In the second Chapter of the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, St. Paul treats of the Method by which we arrive to the Knowledge of spiritual Truths: *They are,*

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he says, *spiritually discerned, and the natural Man cannot receive them, they are Foolishness to him*; and, upon this Authority, even the Use of Reason has been rejected in Inquiries of Religion, and Men sent to the Spirit for Proof. But what the Apostle says here will be found consistent with what has been already said upon this Head. In the third Verse he tells the *Corinthians*, that *his Preaching was not with the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, but in the Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power*; that is, He did not preach from natural Topicks, but preached the Things which the Spirit had revealed to him; and gave the Works of the Spirit, that is, Signs and Miracles, for Proof of his Doctrine. But this was a reasonable Proof still, and such an one as Reason could judge of. Verse the fourteenth he says, *The natural Man cannot receive the Things of the Spirit of God*: Which is very true; for how should natural Reason furnish Arguments to prove the Revelations of God, which have no Connection with natural Principles of Reason? But then he adds, *These Things are spiritually discerned*; or, as he words it in the eighteenth Verse, *they are discerned by comparing spiritual Things with spiritual*; that is, by comparing the Proofs of the Spirit and the Revelations of the Spirit together. This Comparison is the Work of Reason; for Reason discerns the Agreement between these spiritual Things, and, by considering the Works and Wonders of the Spirit, submits to the Revelation of the Spirit. So what the Apostle affirms here is only this, That the Revelations of God are not to be examined or known by Principles or Proofs of natural Reason, but must be manifested by the Proofs of the Spirit; for we have no Proofs from Reason for the Revelations of the Gospel, but we have the Works of the Spirit, by which they are attested. And here it is plain what the Work of the Spirit

Spirit is : It brings Proofs to the Reason of Man, but does not bring the Reason of Man to the Proofs : So that Reason and Faith, or Reason and the Gift of the Spirit, are consistent.

Secondly, As to the Measure in which the Spirit is given, the Scripture is not express : This we are sure of, that all to whom the Spirit is given do not obey the Spirit ; for we read of some who *resist the Spirit of God*, who do *despite to the Holy Spirit* : From whence it is evident, that all who are lost, are not lost for want of due Assistance from God ; since they had the Offer of the Spirit, but refused and withstood his holy Motions. God has engaged in Christ to give us all Things necessary to our Salvation ; and therefore, as far as the Spirit is necessary, so far we are sure of his Assistance. As Men improve in Virtue and Holiness, they contract a greater Familiarity with the Holy Spirit ; with such he is said to *dwell*, to *abide with them* : Which answers to what our Saviour says, *To him that hath, it shall be given ; and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away*. The plain Consequence of which is, that we should, according to the Apostle's Advice, *work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling ; for God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good Pleasure*. If therefore we cease to work whilst we have Time and Opportunity, God will withdraw his Grace from us ; *even that which we have, shall be taken from us*. We cannot work without God : Therefore should we work with Fear and Trembling, lest, if we neglect the appointed Time, we should be left destitute of Help, without Hope or Remedy.

Lastly, We may collect what are the Signs and Marks of Grace in the Regenerate ; even this, That we keep the Will of God. I before observed, that to be drawn off God, and to be willing to do his Will, are one and the

the same Thing: If so, then all who do the Will of God, are drawn of God; and all who are effectually drawn of God, do his Will. From whence it follows, that all who live virtuously and holily have the Spirit of God, and all who do wickedly are of their Father the Devil. From whence it follows, that it is a vain and ill-grounded Confidence that some Men have in their spiritual Attainments, whilst they work the Works of Darkness: For he only that doth the Works of the Spirit, hath the Spirit of God; *and hereby do we know that we love him, if we keep his Commandments.*

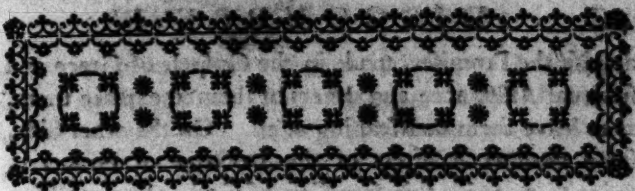


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DISCOURSE IV.



PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

Work out your own Salvation with Fear and Trembling. For it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good Pleasure.

HERE have not, perhaps, been any more unhappy Disputes in the Christian Church than those relating to the natural Powers of Man to work out his own Salvation, and those relating to the Nature and Measure of the Grace and Assistance promised in the Gospel of Christ. On one Side, it is insisted, that Virtue and Vice owe their Being to the Freedom and Choice of the Agent, and lose their Name when they are the Effect of Force and Constraint; and, consequently, that to suppose Men to be made righteous by any Influence from any other Being than themselves, is contrary to Reason. And hence it is that some of the Advocates for mere human Reason, as sufficient to all the Purposes of Salvation, despise

despise the Promises, made in the Gospel, of Grace and spiritual Assistance; and others of them to explain them, as to leave them no Meaning at all. On the other Side, some zealous Asserters of the Doctrine of Grace, in order to magnify this free Gift of God, allow nothing to Reason or the natural Powers of Men; but think it the highest Presumption and the greatest Affront offered to the Grace of God, to suppose that Men can do any Thing for themselves. It is, in their own Way of Expression, to make the Power of God attendant on the Weakness of Man, and to make the Grace of God the Servant and Handmaid of human Reason. And thus it is agreed on both Sides, by those who carry their respective Opinions to the greatest Length, that either the Power of Man to work Righteousness must exclude the Grace of God, or the Grace of God must exclude all the Effects and Endeavours of human Reason.

But as inconsistent as they may think these Things to be, St. Paul, who was better instructed in the Principles of the Gospel of Christ than the ancient or the modern Teachers of these Doctrines can pretend to be, has thought fit to join them together, and has called upon all Christians *to work out their own Salvation*, for this very Reason, because *God works in them both to will and to do*. If St. Paul be in the right, God's working with us by his Grace is so far from being a Reason against working for ourselves, that it is the greatest Inducement to it, and lays us under the highest Obligation to *give all Diligence to make our Calling and Election sure*.

Let us then consider St. Paul's Doctrine, and see what are the natural Consequences for a Christian to draw from it.

The Words of the Text evidently consist of two Parts, an Exhortation, and an Argument by which that Exhortation

tation is enforced. The Exhortation you have in these Words, *Work out your own Salvation with Fear and Trembling*: The Argument to enforce it follows in the next Words, *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good Pleasure*. An Argument which may at first Sight seem rather to lead to Confidence and Assurance, than to Fear and Trembling: For if God be for us, who can be against us? or what is there to fear, or to tremble at, when we are thus supported and maintained in our spiritual Warfare? And the Argument is indeed applicable both Ways, with respect to different Kinds of Fear. The Disciples of the Gospel have many Enemies to encounter with, many Temptations to struggle with; they are exposed sometimes to Death, often to Afflictions and Persecutions, and almost always to the Hatred and Contempt of the World. Now with respect to these Adversaries, the Argument in the Text may furnish us with great Confidence and Assurance, and we may with the Apostle say, *Who shall harm you, if you be Followers of that which is good?* for, notwithstanding all the Trials you are exposed to, *God is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the Presence of his Glory with exceeding Joy*. But as there is a Fear which respects our Enemies, and is a Fear of being conquered and brought into Subjection by them; so likewise is there a Fear which respects our Friends, and is a Fear of losing their Favour and Assistance; and the more a Man is dependent upon his Friends, the greater is, and ought to be, his Fear of losing their Protection: And this Fear naturally inspires us with Diligence and Care to observe and fulfil the Commands of our great Patrons, to study their Humour and Inclination, and to conform ourselves to them. And of this Fear the Apostle speaks in the Text, *Work out your Salvation with Fear*
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and Trembling; for it is a Work that you are by no Means sufficient for of yourselves; and therefore have a Care how you forfeit the Favour of him upon whom you entirely depend: *Of yourselves ye can do nothing; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do.* That St. Paul intends this Sort and Kind of Fear, may be seen by his own Way of reasoning. In the Beginning of this Chapter, he presses Humility upon the *Philippians*, he warns them against Strife and Vain-glory, and, after some Arguments, drawn from the Example of Christ and the great Reward he obtained, to recommend Humility to them, as if Humility and Fear, in the present Case, were the same Thing, he thus concludes, *Wherefore, my Beloved, work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling.* If we believe that God works in us both to will and to do, it will make us humble, because we can do nothing without him; for in such a Case what have we to be proud of? Weakness and a State of Dependence are inconsistent with Confidence and Presumption: It will make us likewise fear and tremble, fear to displease, and tremble to disobey, him from whom cometh our Salvation.

That this Fear is the Fear of offending God, and losing his Favour, is further evident from the next Verse, *Do all Things without Murmurings and Disputings.* Now what Fear is it that makes Men obey cheerfully without repining, without seeking for Excuses to free themselves? Not the Fear of Punishment; for who grumble more than Slaves? who repine more at their Service, or more readily seek and invent Pretences to decline the Orders of their Master? But where the Fear that possesses the Heart is the Fear of disobliging a kind Friend, or a beloved Master, or a Patron upon whom we depend, there Fear gives Wings to Obedience, and makes
a Man

a Man all Ear and no Tongue, ready to receive but not dispute the Command. The following Verse supplies us with the like Argument: The Words are these, *That ye may be blameless and harmless*, or, as the Margin reads it, *sincere, the Sons of God, without Rebuke*. Now then the Fear the Apostle speaks of is the Fear of a Son, the Fear of offending the Father he loves; it is a Fear which makes Obedience blameless, and sincere, and without Rebuke; which no Fear can do, but a Fear of offending him we love, and him we depend on. Other Fears may make the Hands or the Feet obedient; but this Fear only reaches the Heart, and renders Obedience perfect and sincere.

The Christian Law indeed, like all other wise Laws, is fortified with Rewards and Punishments; and these Rewards and Punishments God has proposed to us as Motives of Obedience, of that Obedience which he has promised to accept and reward: And therefore there is no Doubt but that those who obey upon these Motives, shall for their Obedience be rewarded.

But this Fear cannot here be meant: For, first, it will not agree with the Apostle's Argument for fearing: For surely it is no Reason to fear Punishment, that God works in us to will and to do; we should have much more Reason to fear it, if he did not: And this Help and Assistance of God is our greatest Comfort and Consolation against such Fears. Secondly, *To work out his Salvation with Fear and Trembling*, is the Duty of every good Christian. Now to fear Punishment is a proper Restraint upon the evil Wills and Affections of Men, but it is no good Man's Duty; and yet to such the Apostle speaks, as we may see in the Verse of the Text; *Ye have always obeyed, not as in my Presence only, but now much more in my Absence*; and by the Character he gives them in the seventh Verse of the first Chapter,

Both in my Bonds, and in the Defence and Confirmation of the Gospel, ye all are Partakers of my Grace. Now to these good Christians he says, *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling*: This he enjoins them as a Thing, not only highly becoming their Condition, but as necessary to it. But the Fear of Punishment can never be necessary to any good Man's Condition, nor can it ever be made Matter of Precept or Command. For the Law is not made to instill the Fear of Punishment into Men's Hearts; nor is it the Design of the Lawgiver to spread Fear and Terror into the Minds of his People: Penalties are added to enforce Obedience, and therefore concern not those who are ready and willing to obey. It may be Matter of wise Admonition to Christians to set before them the Danger of Disobedience, and to exhort them with our Blessed Lord, *To fear not those who can only kill the Body, but after that can do nothing; but to fear him who has Power both over Body and Soul, and can throw them both into Hell-Fire*: But when do you ever find it enjoined, as Matter of Duty, to be afraid of Hell? Is it any Part of the good Subject's Obedience to live in perpetual Apprehension of Racks and Gibbets, because Racks and Gibbets are provided for Murderers and Robbers? *Wilt thou then not be afraid of the Power?* says our Apostle, *do that which is good*. So that to fear the Power, belongs not to him who does good. God has commanded all Men to live righteously, and threatened severe Punishment to those who live otherwise; but he has no-where commanded all Men to live in Fear of Punishment: But the Exhortation in the Text belongs to all Men, it belongs to the most perfect Christians; and therefore the Fear in the Text is not the Fear of Punishment, which can neither be Matter of Command, or Exhortation, to those who do not want it, that is, to all good Christians, who

who from the Heart obey the Truth. And this may serve to distinguish the Fear and Trembling mentioned in the Text, from the Fear which belongs to Criminals and Slaves; which Fear, the Apostle tells us, *perfect Love casteth out*.

But since there is a Fear and Trembling necessary to the working out of our Salvation, and which must, and ought to rule the Affections of the best of Men, let us consider more distinctly the Nature of this Fear. Now the Reason why we ought to fear, is, because *God worketh in us, both to will and to do*: Let us examine then how far this Argument goes, and that will shew us the Nature of that Fear which is the Consequence of it. To will and to do Good, are the Terms and Conditions of our Salvation; and therefore from whence we have the Power to will and to-do, from thence we have the Means of Salvation. Now Salvation comprehends in it all the Good we are capable of enjoying, without which our Life is Death, and our Hope, Misery: So that, if we depend upon God to-work in us both to will and to do, we depend upon him for all that is, or can be, valuable to Man. And farther, *God worketh in us of his own good Pleasure*: We have no Right or Claim to his Assistance; freely he gave, and freely he may take away, whenever he pleases. Now consider yourself in this State of Dependence, and see what it is you have to fear. All your Danger is in losing the Favour of God; and therefore for that too must be all your Fear. Now this Fear has more of Care and Solitude in it, than of Terror or Amazement: For it is one Thing to be afraid of a Man, lest he should hurt you, and another Thing to be afraid of losing his Favour: The first Fear is Terror, the last is Carefulness. So that the Text is parallel to that Passage in St. Peter,

Give Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure. St. Peter, you see, speaks directly of the Call and Election of Christians; but so far was he from thinking this Call and this Election to be absolute, that he advises those who have the Call and Election, to give all Diligence to make them sure; plainly teaching us, that though God has called and elected us in Christ, yet it depends on our own Care to make them effectual to Salvation. It is one certain Way to forfeit the Gifts of God, not to make use of them; for why should he bestow his Gifts in vain? And therefore it is a great Argument for Diligence and Application, that we depend not upon our own Strength, but the Assistance and Power of God. As for Things which are entirely in our own Power, it may possibly be more for our Convenience, and as well for our Business, to do them to-morrow as to-day: But no Man will run this Hazard when the Thing is in his Power to-day, but may be out of his Power to-morrow. And this is an Argument for immediate Care and Industry: God worketh in us when he thinks fit; and therefore when he thinks fit you must work too; for his Grace will not wait upon your Humour, and be ready at your Beck: And should you neglect the present Opportunity, it may be your last; since you have no Security but from his Good-will and Pleasure; and to play with his Offers, and neglect his Call, is not the Way to obtain them. There is no constant Care without constant Fear. A Man will not be careful to perform what he is not afraid to lose; and therefore, in this Case, that which is an Argument for Care, is an Argument for Fear likewise.

But farther, this Fear arises from a Sense of our own Insufficiency, and our Dependence upon God: But our Insufficiency is no Reason why we should be afraid of God. Because I cannot help myself, it is no Argument

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ment that I must be afraid of him that can : And since God does help our Weakness, it is great Reason we should love and adore him, but not that we should dread and fear him. So that the Fear that arises from hence, is not in the least Degree inconsistent with the perfect Love of God. For the same Reason, that we ought to fear mightily, we ought to love entirely, because *God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good Pleasure.* That it is of his good Pleasure that he assists us, is a great Evidence of his Love to us, and a great Argument for our Love to him. Since then the Cause of this Fear is in ourselves, for it arises from our own Weakness and Inability ; we ourselves, properly speaking, are the only Objects of this Fear. We cannot be afraid of God, because he loves us and helps us ; but we may well be afraid of ourselves, lest, being weak and foolish, as we are, we should not use, as we ought to use, the manifold Gifts and Graces of God. Now then we are come to that which is indeed the good Christian's Fear, his constant Fear ; and that is, the Fear of himself : *Let him that standeth, says the Apostle, take heed lest he fall.* There is no Man so perfect, but that he ought to carry this Fear about him ; and where his Fear points, there must his Care and Diligence be applied, that is, to himself still : He must watch his Passions and Affections, lest any of them break out into open Enmity against God : His rebel Heart must be guarded, lest it quench the holy Flame which God has kindled in it, lest it do Despise to the Spirit of God, which comes to dwell and inhabit in it. And this is a just and an holy Fear, a Fear which is not injurious to the Love of God towards us ; which carries in it no secret Mistrust of his Kindness or Affection, nor is any Blemish to our Faith or Hope in him : Nay, it is a Security to them all ; it preserves the Love of God towards us, as it keeps us from

those Offences which would alienate his Love from us; it preserves our Faith and Hope, by preserving us from those Sins which would destroy them, which would render our Condition hopeless, and our Faith vain. So likewise are the Care and Diligence, which proceed from this Fear, free from any Imputations of Arrogance or Presumption. We set not up for ourselves, as if our own Arm could save us; but for this very Reason we are careful and diligent, because of ourselves we can do nothing: And therefore are we zealous and careful to make use of those Powers which God bestows on us. We are always working, but not our own Work; but we strive to *abound in the Work of the Lord*, as St. Paul expresses it: We hope to be rewarded for our Labour, and yet not for our own, but, as the same Apostle assures us, *we know that our Labour in the Lord is not in vain*. If we hope, we hope in the Lord; if we fear, we fear ourselves. *Perfect Love*, says St. John, *casteth out Fear*, that is, the Fear of him whom we love. Nor is this Fear, thus to be cast out, the Fear of God, for he is on our Side: But a Man's worst Enemies are they of his own Household; and therefore we justly fear our own Hearts and Affections, and over them is all our Care, *that we may keep ourselves unspotted from the World*.

From this Account of the Nature of holy Fear, it will be easy to explain what it is to *work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. God has given us many Laws and Commands, in Obedience to which consisteth our Salvation. He has promised us such Degrees of Assistance, as shall enable us to perform the Conditions required of us. To do the Will of God, to walk in his Laws, is to *work out our Salvation*. This to do, under the Assistance which God has given us, depends upon ourselves: We can miscarry in no Point,
but

but in this which is left to ourselves. Here then all our Diligence and Care is necessary. We are prone to Evil and Mischief, and it requires our constant Application to secure ourselves from falling under the Dominion of Lust and Wickedness; and therefore we must walk circumspectly, watching and observing ourselves; we must be jealous over our own Hearts, for out of them *are the Springs of Life*, as the Wise Man tells us. This makes the Christian State to be a spiritual Warfare; a State of continual Care and Watchfulness, of Fear and Suspicion: So that it is no less than constant Employment for a Man, to walk uprightly with his God. This constant Care can come from nothing, but a Persuasion that it is necessary in our Condition; and he that is well convinced of his own Weakness will be perpetually afraid of miscarrying; which Fear will keep his Diligence awake: So that *to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*, is, with the utmost Care and Diligence to set ourselves to perform the Will and Commands of God, to be diligent *to make our Calling and Election sure*.

There is, in the Language made use of to explain the Doctrine of Grace, something liable to be abused by ignorant or crafty Men. We say, that of ourselves we can do nothing; whence they conclude, that we have nothing to do. We say, that it is the Grace of God which enables us to do every Thing; from whence they conclude, that every Thing must be left to the Grace of God, and that we need only work ourselves into a strong Persuasion that God is at work for us, and may sit still ourselves. And this Persuasion, which is generally mere Enthusiasm, they dignify with the Name of Christian Faith.

But let us try this Language in a common Case, and see whether it be so hard to be understood. Suppose a

Man wanted to move a Weight, that required double his Strength to move it; Would it not be a very proper Expression to say, Of himself he could do nothing? or would it follow, that, if he was offered Help, he should sit still, and not put his own Strength to the Work? If a Friend came to his Assistance, would it not be properly said, that his Friend enabled him to do what he did? but would it follow, that his Friend did all, and he nothing? I mention this, only to guard Men against being misled by mere Sounds; and shall proceed now to consider some Consequences of the Doctrine and Exhortation of the Apostle mentioned in the Text.

And, first, it is evident, that the Christian State is not a State of Security; for Security is inconsistent with any kind of Fear and Trembling, and is indeed a Condition that does not call even for Care or Diligence. In a State of Security a Man cannot even fear for himself; for, to be sure of Salvation, he must be sure of every Thing that is necessary to it; and therefore he must either be sure that he is to have no Part himself in working out his Salvation; or, if he is to have any, he must be sure and certain that he shall perform it: either of which excludes all Manner of Fear and Trembling. Much less can he, who is secure of being saved, fear being punished: So that there is no kind of Fear left for him; and the Apostle's Exhortation will have no Meaning in it to such a Man. *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling:* With Fear of what? since nothing is left to be afraid of. And yet to be sure of our Salvation has been made by some a necessary Sign of Regeneration and Adoption: And hence has proceeded the Doctrine, that Grace once received can never be lost; and, if so, those who have received Grace, can have no Reason to fear and tremble. And yet it cannot be denied that the *Philippians*; to whom the

the Apostle writes, had received Grace; since from his own Testimony we learn, that *they had obeyed always; that in his Bonds, and in the Doctrine and Confirmation of the Gospel, they had been Partakers of his Grace.* Grace then they had received; what then had they to fear? if Grace once received cannot be lost, that is, if Grace gives Security of Salvation. To make then the Apostle consistent with himself, we must affirm, that it is his Doctrine, that Grace may be lost; and that even those, who have made great Progress in Gospel Obedience, are not secure of their State; but must labour on, and work on with Fear and Trembling, lest they come short of the Promises that they have received. And from hence we may comfort and support good Christians, under the many Fears and Misgivings of Mind that attend them in their spiritual Warfare. That you fear, is no Argument of mistrusting God: We have Reason to fear for ourselves; nor will this Fear be taken from us, till we are removed out of this World. Were there any Reason to think, that Security as to our future Condition was among the Gifts of God's Spirit to the true Children of Christ, then indeed our Fears would be Matter of Disturbance to us: But, since the best must fear and tremble, why should we disquiet ourselves because we fear for ourselves? since not only our present Condition requires it, but it is even Part of our Security to fear, and to labour with Care and Diligence, which is the blessed Fruit of holy Fear. To fear that God will not perform his Promises to us, is a wicked Fear: But to fear that we may fall short of those Promises, is a reasonable Fear, our present Weakness considered; and it is a Spur to Virtue. And those who would desire this Thorn in the Flesh to be removed, may be answered, in the Lord's Name, as he answered St. Paul, *My Grace is*

Sufficient for you. You are weak, but the Lord is strong, and his Strength is perfected in Weakness: So that, if your Fear be active and busy, and sets you to work for the Thing you are afraid to lose, there is no doubt but that through Christ you shall be enabled to do all Things.

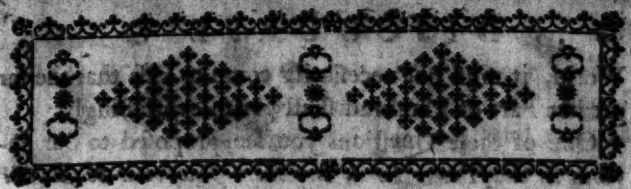
Secondly, From hence we may learn what to think of the Works of Christians. It is, you see, the Apostle's Command, *Work out your Salvation*. Now then Works are necessary to Salvation; and it matters little in what Degree they are necessary, or how they are to be named: If they are necessary, you must do them; and that is enough to secure the Practice of Virtue and Holiness in the World. And for this Reason God works in us, that we may not only will, but do; that is, bring our good Inclinations to Perfection: For why does God work in us to will and to do, if Willing and Doing are not necessary to our Redemption? And perhaps the good Works of Christians may not deserve all the hard Words that have so liberally been bestowed on them, if we consider that they are not the Works of Men, but of God; *for he worketh in us to will and to do*: And therefore our good Works are the Fruits of his Spirit; and are holy because they proceed from an holy Root, the Power of God dwelling in us.

Lastly, Hence likewise we may observe in what Manner God works with the Faithful: St. Paul makes it an Argument for Fear and Diligence. From whence it is evident, that God does not so work in us, as to exclude our own Care and Industry; that is, he does not work irresistibly: For supposing God to work irresistibly, the Wit of Man cannot make an Argument out of it for private Care and Diligence. If God does every Thing in us whether we will or no, what is left for us to do? or what have we to fear and tremble for, when God
alone

alone has undertaken the whole Care and Business of our Redemption? The Work of the Spirit upon the Hearts of the Faithful is to actuate and inspire them: But to perform what is good, is the Business of him who is actuated and inspired. Now it must be allowed, that it is one Thing to give a Man Power to act, another to force him to act. A Man's Will is not influenced by his own Power. He that has ten times the Power to do a Thing that I have, is nevertheless as free to let it alone as I am. And though the Grace of God gives us great Power and Ability to work out our Salvation, yet the Power to will and to work is no Constraint either to will or to work. And in this Sense the Grace of God is a great Argument for Diligence and Care: For, if he furnishes us with Power, it behoves us to see that we make a right Use of it.

In a word then, you have the Assistance of God to enable you to work; which is a great Reason to love and trust him, since he takes this Care of you. Your Danger now is only from yourself; it is in your own Power, but in no other Creature's under Heaven, to defeat your Hopes. You only can rob yourself of the Assistance of God by doing despite to his Holy Spirit, by not obeying when it is in your Power to obey. Be careful therefore, my Brethren, be watchful over yourselves; and, whilst you have Opportunity, *work out your Salvation.*

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DISCOURSE V.

LUKE xiii. 23, 24.

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait Gate: For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

THE Fate of the World at the great Day is so momentous a Point, and in which every Man, who is conscious to himself that he is accountable for his Actions, is so nearly concerned, that it is no Wonder to find Men in every Age inquisitive and curious to pry into this Event. Hence have arisen many nice Speculations concerning God's final Judgment of Mankind: Sometimes we are asked, whether, consistently with the Declarations of the Gospel, any of the Heathen World can be saved; and sometimes, whether, the Strictness of the Gospel Morality considered, and the visible Corruption of the

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World,

World, it must not necessarily come to pass that the far greater Part of Mankind shall perish everlastingly.

One of these Questions you see proposed to our Saviour in the Text, *Lord, are there few that be saved?* You have also our Lord's Answer in the Text, and in the Verses which follow it in *St. Luke*. An Answer applicable not only to this, but to all other Questions of the like Import; and which therefore very well deserves your Consideration.

For the better understanding of which Answer, we must consider, whence it is that Men, not content to examine themselves by the Law of God, and to learn from thence how their own Case stands, are for launching out into the Mysteries of God's Judgments, and inquiring how it shall fare with this or that Nation at the General Judgment, and whether many or few shall be saved at the last.

Whoever will examine into the Bottom of Men's Thoughts upon this Subject, will find that the Conclusion they make is commonly influenced by the Consideration of their own Circumstances. Every Man in this Case takes care of himself, and leaves the Way open to his own Salvation, how strongly soever he bars it against others. The great Advocates of Election and Reprobation always reckon themselves in the Number of the Elect; and, that their Iniquities, of which they are often conscious, may not rise up against them, they maintain that the Act of Man cannot make void the Purpose of God, or the Sins of the Elect deprive them of the Benefit of God's eternal Decree. Thus secured, they despise the Virtues and moral Attainments of all Men, and doom them with all their Virtues to Destruction; whilst they advance themselves with all their Sins to a Throne of Glory prepared for them before the World began.

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Alkin to this was his Conceit who asked our Saviour the Question, *Are there few that shall be saved?* The Jews were God's peculiar People, and enjoyed very great Privileges: Unto them were committed the Oracles of God; to them pertained the Adoption, and the Glory, and the Covenants, and the Giving of the Law, and the Service of God, and the Promises. But, not content with these Privileges, and being thus distinguished by God, they will hardly allow God to have any Thing to do with the rest of the World; unless it were by severe Judgments to afflict and to destroy them: With regard to these Prejudices it is that St. Paul puts the Question to his Countrymen, *Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles?* And we know full well that the Gospel of Christ gave greater Offence to the Jews in no one Particular, than in opening the Door of Salvation to the Gentile World: They looked upon all Nations, but their own, to be unclean, and accounted it an unlawful Thing for a Man that was a Jew, to keep Company, or come unto one of another Nation: And St. Peter was so possessed with this Opinion, that he stood in Need of a special Warning from Heaven, before he would Baptize the honest Centurion Cornelius. Upon the Foot of this Prejudice the Question is put to our Lord, *Are there few that shall be saved?* He who knew what was in Men, and understood their secret Thoughts, gave an Answer which went to the Bottom of the Inquirer's Heart, and without Doubt touched him to the quick; *There shall,* says he, *be Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the Prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God. And behold there are*

last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. This Part of the Answer was levelled directly against the *Jewish* Prejudice, and is a plain Declaration that the Salvation of God should be extended to East and West, North and South, to People of all Parts of the World; and that many, who thought themselves alone entitled to God's Favour in Virtue of their peculiar Privileges, should for their Misconduct and Misbehaviour be finally excluded from his Presence.

The Controversy which has been managed among Christians, concerning the Salvation of the Heathen World, turns upon quite another Point than the *Jewish* Prejudice did. It carries not with it the same Contempt of Mankind. The *Jews* thought none worthy to be Sons of God but themselves; Christians think all worthy, and are desirous that all should be made Partakers of the Glory of God. The *Jews* thought no Nation but their own capable of being received into the Covenant of God, and therefore doomed all to Destruction without Remedy: The Christian thinks every Nation capable of being admitted into the Covenant of Christ; his only Doubt is, whether any Nation, not received into the Covenant, is capable of the Benefits of it. But then considering the infinite Numbers of Men already dead, without any Knowledge of the Gospel, and the great Number still which probably will die in the same Circumstance; this Notion entertained by some Christians, with respect to such Persons, seems to be as peremptory and relentless as the Prejudice of the *Jews*. And the Limitation put upon God's Mercy and Goodness may be found perhaps to be as presumptuous, and as injurious to the Honour and Majesty of God, in one Case as in the other. What then must we say to such Inquirers as these? The Answer in the Text is given them both for their Instruction and their

Rebuke, *Strive to enter in at the strait Gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* As if our Lord had said, You seem, by your Curiosity in inquiring after the State of others, to be secure and at Ease about your own: But turn your Thoughts from others to yourself: As great as your Advantages and Privileges are, your Way is still strait and narrow: Strive therefore and labour to secure your own Entrance into Life; for many of those who have equal Privileges with you, and profess to seek the Kingdom of God, shall not enter into it.

As the Opinions hitherto mentioned confine the Mercy of God within a narrow Compass, and leave the greater Part of Mankind under desperate Circumstances; so there is another which goes into the contrary Extreme, and sets the Doors of Heaven open to all Comers, with little or no Regard to the different Qualifications of Men. They who can make no Title to the Kingdom of God under the Terms of the Gospel, or by the Rules of Virtue and Morality, not willing to give themselves up to Destruction, have persuaded themselves and others, that it is impossible that God should finally doom to Misery so many of his Creatures, as must necessarily suffer, if they are to be judged by the strict Rules of Morality, or the no less strict Rules of the Gospel. And having no Hope but in the Mercy of God, no Excuse but in the Infirmities and Weaknesses of human Nature, Necessity makes them eloquent upon this Subject; and the finest Things are said to display the Goodness of God, and set it forth in the liveliest Colours; and to represent the Distress of Nature, and the utter Inability of Man to do good in this fallen degenerate State. Thus concluding all Men under Sin, they hope to escape in the Crowd: It would be inexorable Cruelty, they think,

to make all, or most Men miserable; and therefore, let God be good, and all Men be Sinners, and they are safe.

To such Inquirers as these, we say, That they mistake in all their Reckoning: For, if it be just to punish Sinners, no Reason can be given why Twenty should not be punished as well as Ten, or an Hundred as well as Twenty. There were Sinners enough in the World to have saved the World at the general Deluge, if Numbers would have done. When *Sodom* was destroyed, ten righteous Men would have saved the City; but the Number of the Wicked was never pleaded in Bar of Justice. Neither does the Race of Men make so considerable a Figure in the System of the Universe, as to endanger the Whole, if they miscarry. Let Men be Sinners, yet God will not want those who will serve and obey him: Or, if he should, let him speak the Word, and Millions will arise at his Command: *Think not therefore to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father; for God is able of these Stones to raise up Children unto Abraham.* If all Men should forsake him, he can, when he pleases, repair the Loss: He is not so weak, or in such Want of the Service of Men, as to be guided by such politick Reasons as oftentimes, reasonably enough, prevail with temporal Princes to spare an offending Multitude. Leave therefore the rest of the World to the Judgment and Mercy of God, and mind you the Law that is set before you as the Condition of Life, and *strive to enter in at the strait Gate.*

You see by this Account, that our Saviour did not think fit to answer the Curiosity of this Inquirer: And, since he declined the Question, who alone was able to resolve it, it is absurd to ask the Question of any-body else; and it is great Presumption in any-body else to pretend

pretend to answer it. From Natural Religion we may learn much of the Equity and Justice of God, and of the Terms of Obedience upon which we may hope to partake of his Mercy; But how many, or how few, will act by the Laws of Reason, and qualify themselves for the Mercy of God, Natural Reason and Religion can never shew. Nor is there any Reason to expect a Resolution of this Doubt in the Books of Scripture; for had it been a Piece of Knowledge proper to be communicated to us, why was it not declared by our Lord, when the Question was so fairly stated to him? or why does he give such an Answer here, as is plainly calculated not to satisfy the Curiosity of Mankind in this great Point, but to restrain and to rebuke it? The Question is, *Are there few that be saved?* The Answer is in Effect, What is that to you? mind your own Business, and *strive to enter in at the strait Gate.*

Two Things there are, in which every Man has a Right to require Satisfaction, and without which he can upon no reasonable Grounds pretend to Religion: One relates to the Method of God's dealing with Mankind, and comes to this Point, Whether all Men are capable, and, if not all, who are capable of Salvation? The other relates to our own Conduct and Behaviour, and resolves itself into this Inquiry, Upon what Terms we may expect Salvation? Now, as to these two necessary Inquiries, our Saviour is so far from avoiding them, that he has expressly and clearly determined them. As to the first, he has told us, that Salvation belongs to all Men, of every Country and Nation; and that the Kingdom of Heaven is open to receive those who come from the East and West, from the North and South. As to the second, he declares, that all the Workers of Iniquity will be excluded from the Presence of God; and therefore exhorts us to *strive to enter in at the strait Gate:*
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And to quicken our Diligence, and to raise in us a Concern equal to the Interest we have at stake, he informs us farther, *that many who will seek to enter, shall not be able.* Being thus far instructed, what farther Demand have you upon your Teachers? Would you know before-hand what your Lot will be? and whether you shall be in the Number of those who shall seek and find, or among those who would enter in; but shall not be able? What has a Teacher of Religion to do in this Matter? Is it ever expected of a Lawgiver, that he should tell who will obey and be happy, and who will transgress the Law and be punished? Nay, what has a Learner in Religion to do with this Point? Do you want to be made either careless or desperate? Is either State a desirable one to a Man disposed to be seriously religious? But you may think perhaps that it would have another Effect upon you; that it will give great Ease and Satisfaction to your Mind, to be secure as to your future Condition, and enable you with great Chearfulness to bear all the Hardships and Discouragements to which Virtue stands exposed. I am indeed persuaded that this Effect would often follow; that many Righteous would be resolutely righteous, and act with Views above this World, and as Citizens of another Country, upon certain Assurance given them of future Glory. But consider, the Terms upon which we are to be happy in another World must be such as are consistent with our State and Condition in this. It is impossible to imagine it to be reasonable for God to place us in this World, and then to give such Hopes of another, as should render us unfit to support the several Characters imposed on us here. And it is much to be doubted whether the best Men would not be rendered useless to this World by such Security given for their own future Happiness as some seem to desire. They would probably

bably be lost in the Prospekt of their own future Happiness, and grow stupid to the World, and act as if they did, in the literal Sense, hate Father and Mother, Brother and Sister: Whereas now the Sense of Religion under which they live, the Necessity they know themselves to be under to work out their own Salvation, obliges them to discharge all the Offices and Duties of Life regularly and honourably; since there is no Way of securing our Happiness in another World, but by doing all the Good we can in this.

And if this Sort of Knowledge would probably render good Men useless to the World, it would certainly render bad Men exceedingly pernicious to it. Despair is the Height of Madness; and were all bad Men to be made mad and outrageous, it would perhaps be hard to find Keepers to guard them, and to protect the rest of Mankind from their Fury. To live amongst Men who knew themselves destined to eternal Misery, what else would it be but living among the Damned, and being exposed to all their Malice and Revenge, made ten times more malicious and revengeful by their Despair?

But if it can serve no good Purpose to communicate to us this Knowledge with respect to ourselves, and our own future State and Condition, what Purpose can it possibly serve to give us this Knowledge with respect to others, and their future Condition? What is it to us to know the exact Proportion between the Good and Bad, or to know how many or how few shall finally miscarry? Would this Knowledge alter our own Condition in any Respect? Would it affect the Terms of our Salvation, or make it easier for us to work out our own Salvation? If not, to what Purpose is it desired? unless perhaps you secretly imagine that God means not to execute his Threatnings against Sinners, but will save all at the last;
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and you want to be let into this Secret, that you may sin without Fear. If this be indeed your Case, do you not see that your Curiosity is irreligious, and springs from a corrupted Heart, which wants to be freed from the Fear of Hell, only to enjoy the Pleasure of Sin? And can you still wonder why God does not gratify such a Curiosity as this, and reveal the secret Mysteries of his Providence, to encourage you in Vice and Immorality? It wants but little Reflection in this Case to see that the Reason why this Knowledge is desired, is a very good Reason why it should not be granted.

In general, it is very absurd to expect that Judgment should go before Trial: And therefore, as this Life is a State of Trial, and is naturally to be followed by a Day of Judgment, it is unnatural to declare the final State of Men before their Trial is over; and with respect to any Judgment, but the Judgment of God, it is impossible; for no other just Judge can tell what his Sentence will be before the Trial is over.

The Scope which Men give to their Imaginations upon this Subject, when they leave their only sure Guide, the Word of God, is always dangerous, and oftentimes fatal to them. If you are contented to take God's Word for the Method he intends to pursue in the Judging of the World, you will soon see, that, in order to be happy, you must be good. If you want Restraint, the Threatnings of God are terrible: If you want Comfort, the Promises of the Gospel are the only proper Cordial for penitent Sinners. Thus will you find yourself equally guarded against Presumption and Despair, so long as you follow the Light of God's Word. But if you indulge your own Conceit, and imagine that God will be either better or worse to you than he has declared, you expose yourself to manifest Peril. If in the Gaiety of your Heart you imagine God means little by
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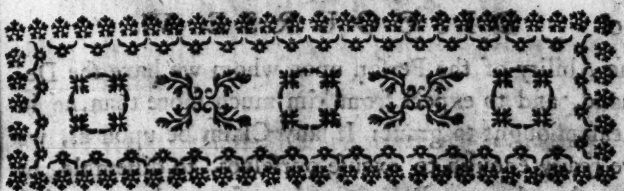
his Threatnings, and made use of them only to deter Men from Vice, without ever intending a rigorous Execution, it is very probable that you will take Advantage of your own Discovery, and abate as much in your own Goodness, as you do in God's Severity. If you are of a colder Constitution, and more inclined to melancholic Thoughts, your Imagination will shew you God clothed only with Terrors; and your Heart, oppressed with Fear, will sink, and leave you no Courage to go on with the Duties of Religion, from which your Fears will suffer you to have no Hope or Expectation.

If you extend your Thoughts farther, and lay Schemes for the general Judgment of the World, it is well if this unnecessary Concern for others does not prove prejudicial to yourself. If you confine the Mercies of God to yourself and your own Sect only, it is an Opinion which not only ascribes great Partiality to God, but it tends to introduce Cruelty and Inhumanity into the Temper of every Man so persuaded. We easily come to think it a Virtue to hate those whom God hates: And then the Consequence is, that there must be a Stop to all Intercourse of good Offices with all Men, the few only excepted who think as we think. And thus, by passing a rash Judgment in a dark mysterious Point, and which of all others does least concern us, we shall extinguish the noblest Grace of the Gospel, the plainest Duty of a Christian, and which of all others does most affect the Peace and Happiness of Mankind.

If, in Honour to the Mercy of God, you open the Doors of Heaven to Men of all Professions in the World, who live well according to the Measure of Light bestowed on them; though your Opinion has in it much more Humanity and more common Sense than that before-mentioned, yet, by thus dealing to all indifferently Graces and Mercies which are not in your Disposal, it
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is well if you do not hazard your own Share. It is this Opinion, if I am not deceived, that leads many into Contempt of the Gospel of Christ Jesus: For, when they think all Religions equally good, and all Men equally secure who follow their Religion, be it what it will, they raise unawares a Question which they cannot answer, namely, To what Purpose was the Gospel given? For, if all Men are equally secure under all Religions, what can be the Advantage of one Religion above another? When Men are led into this inextricable Maze, by setting up themselves for Judges of the World, they know not where to fix: They lose all Regard to the best and purest Religion, by doing such professed and undeserved Honour to the worst.

You see then how useless, how dangerous a Thing it is, to go out of our Way to meddle with Things so far above us. If you would resolve to take care of One, that Resolution would furnish you with sufficient Employment: For, be your Advantages ever so great, yet all who have your Advantages will not be saved; for of those who seek to enter, many will not be able; and many, of whom you little think, may perhaps go before you; for God has those whom he will own, in the East, and the West, and the North, and the South. Leave him to find out those whom he will honour, and look you to the Point which is indeed your true, your only Concern, the Salvation of your own Soul, and strive to enter in at the strait Gate.



DISCOURSE VI.



LUKE xii. 48.

Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: And to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

THE Equity of this general Rule is so apparent to common Sense, that it admits of no Dispute, and calls for no Explanation. A single Mite offered by a poor Widow is a Present fit for the King of Heaven, which from the Hand of a rich Man would hardly be a decent Charity to a poor Widow. And thus the Case is in all Instances to which the Rule is applicable.

But plain as this general Maxim is, yet we are very apt to mistake in the Application of it to particular Cases: For then Self-Love and Self-Interest will not permit us to discern that true Proportion of one Thing to another, from which the Equity of the Rule arises. If we have any Claim to make in our own Behalf, we think nothing too much, and are apt to overrate the

the Ability of the Person upon whom we have the Demand, and to expect from him much more than he in Reason ought to grant: If any Claim be upon us, we are ready enough to excuse ourselves, to dissemble, or to undervalue our Power, and consequently to do less than may in Reason and Justice be required from us. Hence it is that we are rarely pleased with those who are above us, and seldom able to satisfy those who are below us.

As this Rule has Place in the Intercourse of all the Offices of Life, so ought it especially to influence the Distribution of Rewards and Punishments: But the Weakness and Wickedness of Men have almost totally excluded it from human Judicatures. For as it is in every-body's Power to pretend Ignorance of the Law, or some other Inability, in Excuse for the Crimes for which they are to answer; were the Plea as easily admitted as it is pleaded, it would open a Door to all kind of Licentiousness, and take off the Fear of Punishment, which is so necessary a Restraint upon the depraved Inclinations of Men: And since the wisest and ablest Judges cannot discern, some few Cases perhaps excepted, between real and affected Ignorance; or so distinguish the Powers and Abilities of one Man from another, as to proportion Rewards and Punishments according to this Rule; therefore the Law puts all, except those who are manifestly deficient in Reason, upon the same Level, and supposes every Man to know the Law of his Country; and consequently, where a malicious Act is proved, a malicious Intention is implied, and the Criminal is sentenced accordingly.

But how justifiable soever this Proceeding is, upon the Necessity there is for it in order to maintain some tolerable Degree of Peace and Quiet in the World; yet it is evident that these general Presumptions, upon
which

which all human Judicatures proceed, do not leave Room for an exact Distribution of Justice; but it often happens, that Men are made equal in the Punishment, whose Crimes, could all Circumstances be considered, were not equal.

But could you introduce a Judge endowed with the perfect Knowledge of Men's Hearts, there would be an End of all such general Presumptions: He would do in every Case what was exactly right and equitable; and the only standing Rule of the Court would be that of the Text, *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.*

One such Court there is, in which He who knows the Secrets of every Heart will sit Judge himself; before whose Tribunal there will want no Evidence to convict the Guilty, no Advocates to defend the Innocent: There no pretended Excuse will be admitted, no real one excluded: There every Man with all his Actions, with all his Talents and Abilities, and all his Opportunities of knowing the Will of God, will be weighed in the Balance; and *unto whom much was given, of him shall much be required.*

Since then we are to be judged, and finally sentenced, by this Rule, it concerns us to be careful in the Application of it to ourselves; for if we mistake, we shall gain only a deceitful Security, and which at the last will prove fatal: And there is the more Reason for this Care, considering how apt Men are to make unreasonable Allowances to themselves, where their own Interest is concerned.

It is no uncommon Thing for Men who have no Hopes of being justified by the Terms of the Gospel, to take shelter in this general Declaration, and to imagine that they see an Equity in their own Case, which shall stand between them and the rigorous Execution of the Gospel

Gospel Law. When they read in the New Testament, that all Whoremongers and Adulterers, all Drunkards and riotous Persons, all Extortioners and fraudulent Dealers, in a Word, all who in any manner injure their Neighbours and Fellow-Creatures, shall without Doubt perish everlastingly; they plainly perceive that the Crimes and the Punishment are so inseparably annexed, that, being conscious of the Crimes, they have no way to ward off the Punishment. But when they read, that *unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required*, and infer from thence, that unto whomsoever little is given, of him shall little be required; they immediately conclude, that all their Errors and Mistakes, of what kind soever, are well secured; For whoever is in Error, be it through want of Understanding, or of the external Means of Knowledge, or be it through Passion and Prejudices, does, so long as the Error continues, want the Light, and is so far to be considered as one to whom little is given. This is one Step towards their Justification: But still Conscience remains, and proves that they had the Light in many Instances in which they have been Offenders. But then they consider, that to render a Man accountable for his Actions, it is not enough that he knows the Terms of his Duty, he must also have Power to put them in Execution: For no Man ought to be punished for not acting, who never had it in his Power to act, or for doing what was not in his Power to avoid doing. Being thus far advanced, they recollect all the Temptations and Incitements they met with, and how strongly their Passions were moved to the Commission of those Iniquities of which their Conscience accuses them; and, being Judges disposed to favour the Criminal, they conclude, it was not in their Power to do otherwise than they did; and since so little was given them, they shall be answerable but for little:

little : And thus secured they imagine they may safely appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ, and plead to him his own Rule of Equity against all the peremptory Laws of his Gospel.

Allow this Plea, and it will indeed justify all Men, and leave no Room for Judgment; but it must reflect great Dishonour and Reproach on him who made them, and has declared to them a Judgment to come, as well by the Reason which he has given them, as by the Revelation which he has published.

Few Men are so essentially wicked as to chuse Wickedness for its own Sake : either Error or Passion is pleaded in all Cases. The *Canaanites*, who worshipped the Work of Men's Hands, were greatly in Error; and the wicked Inhabitants of *Sodom* and *Gomorrab* had strong unnatural Passions : But these by Fire from Heaven, and those by the Sword of *Joshua*, were rooted out : Which Part now would you take ? Were they Sinners, or was the Judge of all the World unjust ?

If Men are really of such a Make, that their Passions are too strong for their Reason, and Reason of no Use but to contrive Means for the Satisfaction of the Passions and Appetites ; it is impossible to justify God in giving such Creatures any Notion of a Judgment to come : For to what Purpose does it serve but to plague and torment them unnecessarily ? And how is it reconcileable with the Goodness of God, to plant such Seeds of Misery in our very Nature ? to arm the little Reason we have against us, which is perpetually placing Fears and Terrors before us, which yet have, can have, no Relation to us ?

In order to clear this Matter, there are two Things proper to be considered :

First, To what Instances this Rule of the Text is extended by our blessed Saviour and his Apostles.

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Secondly,

Secondly, How far we may extend and apply this Rule by Parity of Reason to other Cases.

That we may bring this Inquiry within proper Bounds, it is fit to observe, in the first Place, That the Rule of the Text is never applied in Scripture to extenuate or excuse immoral Actions upon account of the Violence of the Temptation from whence they proceed. So far from it, that even indulging the Passion is imputed as Sin, though the immoral wicked Action does not ensue: *He that hateth his Brother, says an Apostle, is a Murderer; and he that looketh upon a Woman to lust after her, says our Blessed Saviour, hath already committed Adultery with her in his Heart.* If the Case be so, if Hatred has in it the Guilt of Murder, and Lust has the Guilt of Adultery; how shall Murder be excused because it proceeds from violent Hatred; or Adultery because it proceeds from violent Lust? *St. James has plainly condemned the Profaneness of justifying our Iniquities by accusing our Constitutions, and consequently by accusing him who made us: Let no Man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: For God cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man. But every Man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own Lust, and enticed. Then when Lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth Sin: And Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth Death.* James i. 13, 14, 15. All Sin is here described to be the Effect of violent and inordinate Lust and Passion: But this is so far from being considered as an Excuse for Sin, that it immediately follows, that Sin so produced *bringeth forth Death.* The Scripture has recorded to us the immoral Actions of many Persons; but is there any Instance where Immoralities are pitied or excused because of the Lust and Passions from whence they proceeded? No. *Wise Men are to make such Excuses for themselves, who are not*

not apt to make them for others. When you read that *Abab* slew *Naboth*, are you apt to say, Poor Man, how could he help it, for he longed extremely for his Vineyard? When you read that *David* slew *Uriab* and corrupted his Wife, do you excuse his Iniquity, because his Passion was strong? If you do, it is more than he did for himself; for when he came to himself, he cried, *I have sinned against the Lord*. Which one sorrowful Confession of his Iniquity was worth a thousand of the Excuses which Men usually make in like Cases. In the Verses before the Text, our Saviour puts the Case of those who have received much, and of those who have received less: Of those who received least he says, *They shall be beaten for doing Things worthy of Stripes*: By which it appears, that all who have Sense to distinguish between Good and Evil are subject to Judgment; and no Hope is given them of being saved by the Strength of their Passion, when they act against the Light of their Reason.

But there will be Occasion to consider this Particular again, in stating the Case or Cases to which the Rule of the Text is applied in Scripture.

Now the Rule as applied in Scripture does chiefly concern those who enjoy the Light of God's Word, and have the Advantages of the Gospel to enable them to work out their Salvation: These are they who are said in the Text *to have received much*: and the Comparison lies between them, and the rest of the World who have the Light of Reason only to direct them; and these last mentioned compared with the others are they *who have received little*.

The Case of these two Sorts of People is very accurately stated in the Verses before the Text, which must therefore be considered. *That Servant*, says our Blessed Saviour, *which knew his Lord's Will, and prepared not himself,*

himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit Things worthy of Stripes, shall be beaten with few Stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.

The Case, you see, is put with respect to Sinners under the different Circumstances of knowing, and not knowing, the Will of their Lord. What we are to understand by the Will of their Lord will appear, if we consider, that they who knew not the Will of their Lord are yet supposed here to do Things worthy of Stripes; which supposes them to have the Light of Reason, and a Knowledge of the Difference between Good and Evil: For no Man can in a moral Sense be said to do Things worthy of Stripes, unless he has Reason to distinguish between the Things which are, and which are not, worthy of Stripes. Since therefore they who have this Light of Reason are yet supposed not to know their Lord's Will, it is evident that to know the Will of our Lord implies something more than having the Light of Reason to direct us; and consequently must mean our having the Light of God's Word for our Direction.

Secondly, You see that Sinners under all Circumstances are condemned to Punishment. They who knew their Lord's Will are condemned for not doing according to his Will: They who knew not his Will are not condemned for not doing according to the Rule of which they had no Knowledge, but they are sentenced for committing Things worthy of Stripes, that is, such Things as they, according to the Light they had, knew to be sinful. And this agrees exactly with what St. Paul to the Romans has declared: *As many as have sinned without Law, shall also perish without Law: and as many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law.*

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But then, as the Knowledge of God's Will is a great Advantage to those who know it, so will their Punishment be in Proportion greater, if they offend against this Knowledge: They therefore *shall be beaten with many Stripes*. Others, though their Iniquities and Offences against the Light of Reason, which God gave them, shall not go unpunished; yet shall their Punishment be mitigated in respect to what others must endure, and *they shall be beaten but with few Stripes*.

This general Determination agrees with a more particular one to be found in the Chapter before the Text; *Wo unto thee, Chorusan, wo unto thee, Bethsaida. For if the mighty Works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented in Sackcloth and Ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the Judgment than for you.* Luke xi. 13, 14.

Tyre and Sidon were Cities distinguished in the Jewish Prophets for their great Abominations and Iniquities; and the Jews, it is likely, thought that it would fare worse with none at the Day of Judgment than with those Cities. But our Saviour tells them it should fare worse with the Cities which had seen his mighty Wonders, and yet refused to repent at his Call. Which Judgment of his was far from justifying or excusing the Iniquities of Tyre and Sidon, or giving any Promise of Impunity to their Sins. It supposes them to be reserved to great Judgments, and threatens still severer Punishment to those who under greater Advantages were equal Sinners.

Consider now the World as divided into two Parts; one whereof has had the Oracles of God committed to them, and enjoyed the Light and Direction of his Word; and the other has been left to the Guidance of mere Reason and Nature, and that Knowledge of Good

and Evil to which no rational Creature can be an utter Stranger; and you may, from the Maxim of the Text, learn these general Truths with respect to each Sort and Condition of Men:

First, That no Man shall be judged by a Law of which he had no Knowledge, but every Man shall stand or fall by the Light that was given him: It being true of every moral Action, what St. Paul has affirmed of Almsgiving, *It shall be accepted according to that a Man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*

Secondly, That immoral Actions admit of no Excuse, but will subject every Man to the Judgment of God. For Morality not being founded primarily upon the Authority of Revelation, but upon that Reason which is a common Gift to Mankind, every Man must answer for the Use of his own Reason: And where Reason shews him the Difference of Good and Evil, if he chuses the Evil he is without Excuse. There is no Justification, no Excuse, to be offered for Sin in this Case: It is in vain to plead Passion or Temptation, for Reason was given for this very Purpose, to govern Passion: And the submitting to Passion and Temptation against the Light of Reason is the very Depravity and Corruption of Heart that calls for Vengeance: And therefore to plead Passion as an Excuse for acting against your Reason, is to plead your own Iniquity as a Reason why you should not be punished. This Rule laid down by St. James is decisive in this Point, *To him that knoweth to do Good, and doth it not, to him it is Sin.*

It may be said perhaps, that the Notions of Morality differ in different Places; and that, through the Power and Force of Custom and Education, the Things which appear to some to be worthy of Stripes, appear to others in another Light, and to have nothing criminal in them. Be it so: For I mean not to contest this

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Piece of History at present. But yet, I say, this avails not in the present Argument, nor affords any Advantage to them who seek to excuse Iniquity by pleading Passion and Infirmary. Where there is no Conscience of Sin, there is no Room to look out for Excuses: And therefore whatever Allowance may be made to those, who in such unhappy Circumstances sin without Knowledge; yet certain it is, that all who contrive Excuses for themselves can have no Advantage of this Circumstance: For the very making an Excuse shews the Conscience of Sin, and is a Conviction that you have in your own Opinion committed Things worthy of Stripes. How foolish a Thing then is it to lose the Prospect of Pardon, by deceiving yourself into an Opinion that you do not want one? Such Sins may be forgiven through Repentance, but no Art, no Wit of Man will ever justify them.

Thirdly, It appears from this Determination made by our Blessed Saviour, That all who know the Will of God, and live under the Light of his Gospel, shall, whether they like it or whether they like it not, be finally judged according to the Gospel. The Rule is peremptory: *All who know the Will of their Lord, and prepare not themselves, nor do according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes.* Men act sometimes as if they thought it were in their own Power to chuse what Law they would be judged by. As soon as they profess Natural Religion, they look upon themselves to have no farther Concern with the Gospel, but seem satisfied that they shall be judged by their own Notions. But if the Gospel of Christ be indeed, as indeed it is, the Will of God, it will not be so easily parted with. It is the Law of our great Master, and obey it we must. The Advice of a Friend we may use or refuse as we think fit; but the Laws of our Superiors must be obeyed.

True, you'll say, supposing it to be the Law of our Superior; but that is the very Thing which you cannot admit. Look well to it, that this Persuasion be not your Crime: The People of *Chorazin* and *Bethsaida* did not believe in Christ Jesus, yet the Evidence placed before their Eyes was such, that their Disbelief was the very Circumstance which rendered their Case more deplorable than that of *Tyre* and *Sidon*. The People of *Jerusalem* were also Unbelievers, yet such was their Unbelief, that at last the Things which made for their Peace were hid from their Eyes. Here then is your Case: You have the Gospel of Christ Jesus before you; it claims your Obedience upon no slight Credentials; it was introduced by greater Works than ever Man did; it was sealed with the Blood of its great Author, and has been handed down to you by those who sacrificed all that was dear to them in the World in Confirmation of its Truth. Think not then that it can be an indifferent Matter whether you receive or reject this Law; so that it matters not by what Light you walk, since you expect so much Equity from God that he will judge you according to the Light you have: For if the Gospel be the Law of God offered to you, as it certainly is, and you are in the Number of those *unto whom much was given, of you therefore shall much be required*.

The Mercy of God offered to you in the Gospel through Christ Jesus is a Call to Repentance from dead Works: It is a Summons to you, to turn to the living God in Works of Righteousness and Holiness. When *John the Baptist* gave Notice of the near Approach of our Blessed Lord, the Sum of his Doctrine was, *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand*. Our Saviour and his Disciples introduce the Gospel with the same Warning; and *St. Paul* teaches, that God, who winked at the Times of Ignorance, now, under the Gospel, *calleth*

calleth all Men every-where to Repentance; and hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness. If then the great Promises made through Christ Jesus belong only to Penitents, who forsake Sin, and turn to God in Newness of Heart, how sadly do Men impose upon themselves, who trust to be saved by God's Mercy, without doing the Work of God, and continue in Sin in Hopes that Grace may abound? Little do they consider, that those false presumptuous Hopes will prove in the End great and real Aggravations of their Iniquity. To sin in Hopes of Mercy, is abusing the Mercy of God, and making the Goodness of our heavenly Father a Reason for disobeying him. To plead the Death or Merits of Christ in Excuse or in Justification of Iniquity, will so little avail, that it will amount to a Condemnation out of our own Mouths. *Christ died to destroy the Works of the Devil, to redeem us from Sin, to sanctify an elect People to God:* Every Christian knows this, or may know it, if he looks into his Bible. Consider now what the Plea in Excuse for Sin amounts to: In the Mouth of a Christian it must come to this; I know that Christ died to destroy Sin, but I will keep my Sins, and trust in his Death: I know that the Promises of God are made to those only who forsake their evil Deeds; but I will depend on his Promises for the Pardon of my evil Deeds, though I forsake them not. These are the Persons, who, by abusing Christ and his Redemption, do put him to open Shame in the World, and, in the Language of the Apostle, *do crucify to themselves afresh the Son of God.* Happy had it been for such Men, had they been born in the darkest Corners of the Earth, to which the glad Tidings of the Gospel never came: Then they might have pleaded Ignorance, and Weakness, and Want of the Knowledge of God's Will: but now they live, and

act, and reason like Heathens in the Noonday-light of the Gospel. And what can be the Consequence of such a Life, and such a Knowledge, but this only, *that they shall be beaten with many Stripes?*

As to ourselves, we have great Reason to bless God daily that by his good Providence we have been born and educated in a Christian Country; that we have been admitted into the Church of his Blessed Son, and have had betimes the Means of Knowledge and of Grace communicated to us: But let us take heed that we do not turn these Blessings into Curses upon ourselves by our abusing them. These are great Talents which our Blessed Lord has entrusted us with, if we use them as we ought: If we improve them to the Glory of God, and the Good of them about us, happy will it be for us, and we shall one Day hear that blessed Sentence, *Enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.* But if we neglect these great Opportunities of Salvation which God now affords, they will one Day rise up in Judgment against us, and condemn us. And it shall be more tolerable for *Sodom* and *Gomorrab* in that Day, than for wicked Christians, who were redeemed by the Cross of Christ, but who accounted the Blood of the Covenant a vain Thing; who were sanctified by the Holy Ghost, but did Despise to the Spirit of God; who were bought with a Price to be the Servants of God, but who sold themselves for Slaves to Iniquity.

Lay hold therefore, my Brethren, of the Mercy of God, while the Day of Mercy lasts; for if you neglect or despise the Goodness of God, which calleth us to Repentance, this will be your Condemnation, that *Light is come into the World, and you chose Darkness rather than Light.*

DISCOURSE VII.

LUKE iv. 1, 2.

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the WilderNESS, being forty Days tempted of the Devil.

A**T****T****E****R** our Saviour had washed his Disciples Feet, and wiped them with a Towel, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? None answering this Question, he explained to them himself the Meaning of what he had done: *Ye call me, says he, Master, and Lord: And ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your Feet, ye also ought to wash one another's Feet. For I have given you an Example, that you should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him. If ye know these Things, happy are ye if ye do them. Should you ask the like Question concerning the History*

in the Text, our Saviour's Temptation in the Wilderness, and say, What is this that has been done unto him? How came the Son of God to be thus insulted by the Powers of Darkness? Whence arose the Tempter's Confidence and Power? or why were consummate Virtue and Innocence submitted to this Proof and Trial? You might be answered in like Manner also, *He hath given us an Example, that we should do as he hath done.* Were you to hear the Complaints, which even good Men often make, that they are forced to struggle with many and with great Temptations; that the Paths of Virtue are slippery and insecure, beset with many Dan- gers; and that their Prayers to be delivered from their Trials come empty back and bring no Blessing with them; you might in our Saviour's Name and in his Words expostulate the Case with them: *Ye call me Lord and Master: And ye say well; for so I am. If I then your Lord and Master have been perfected through Trials, and in all Things tempted even like unto you, whence come your Complaints? whence is it that you expect to be exempted from that Condition to which I willingly submitted? The Servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. I have led the Way, and shewn you how to conquer: And if ye know these Things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

Since these Things therefore are written for our In- struction and Admonition, the properest Use we can make of them is to consider them in that View, and to keep at a Distance from such nice Questions as no Man enters into with Discretion, or gets out of with Advantage. There is Room in all the Parts of the Gospel Dispensation to admire and adore the Wisdom and the Goodness of God, if that will content us, without pry- ing into the secret Methods of his Providence. In this Case now before us we want not Matter of this Kind:

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When the Tempter allured our first Parents to Disobedience with the flattering Hopes that they should be as Gods, little did the blind Prophet think that the Day should ever come when the Son of God would appear in the Likeness of Man, to take Vengeance of his bold Attempt, to destroy his Works, and to redeem the Captives into the glorious Liberty even of the Sons of God: Little did he imagine that Man, who fell by aspiring to be like God, should ever indeed be so like him, as to be superior to all his Arts and Temptations, and be able to drive him from the Dominion he had usurped over the Creation. And yet, behold the Wisdom and the Goodness of God! By Man came Death, and by Man came the Plenteousness of Redemption: The first Fruits of which we see in this Victory over the Tempter.

Thus with respect to God does this Temptation afford an ample Subject of Praise and Glory: But, considered with respect to ourselves, it will yield us the greatest Comfort and Consolation to support us in our spiritual Warfare, and the best Instruction how to behave ourselves in it. There is no doubt to be made but that all the Tempter's Art was displayed against our Saviour: Here then we may learn the worst we have to fear, and see the Dangers we have to pass, in our Way to Happiness, and secure ourselves against the Surprizes which are often fatal to heedless unguarded Innocence: Here too we may learn from the best Example how to make the best Defence against the different Temptations we stand exposed to; how manfully to maintain the Combat, and to resist the fiery Darts of the Devil.

These Lessons of Christian Prudence and Fortitude are to be learnt from our Saviour's Conduct and Behaviour under the different Trials the Tempter made
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of him: But I propose at this Time to consider the Circumstances which attended this Temptation, and are recorded by the Evangelist in my Text: *And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the Wilderness, being forty Days tempted of the Devil.* Now this Temptation, we see, succeeded immediately to his Baptism, in which the Spirit visibly descended upon him; and God declared him, in a Voice from Heaven, to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. And accordingly the Text expressly tells us, that he was led to be tempted *being full of the Holy Ghost.*

You see the Power of Baptism, and the Blessings that are annexed to it, to which all are intitled who partake in the Baptism of Christ: For himself he was neither born nor baptized, but for our sakes; that the Blessings of both might descend on us, who through Faith are Heirs together with him of the Promises of God.

By Baptism the Gates of Heaven are set open to us, and the Way paved for our Return to our native Country: By Baptism we are declared to be such Sons of God in whom he will delight, and whom he will appoint to be Heirs of his Kingdom: By Baptism we receive the Promise of the Spirit, by which we cry, *Abba, Father.*

Are not these great Privileges? And is not here room for mighty Expectations? And yet how unsuitable to these Claims do the Circumstances of a Christian's Life often appear? He is upon the Road to Heaven, you say, and the Gates stand open to receive him; but how does he stumble and fall like other Men, and sometimes lose his Way, and wander long, bewildered in Night and Darkness? or, if he keeps the Road, how lazily does he travel, as if he were unwilling to come to his Journey's End; and afraid to

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see the Country which he is going to possess? The Christian only of all Men pretends to supernatural Power and Strength, and an intimate Acquaintance with the Spirit of God: And yet how hardly does he escape the Pollutions of the World, and how often look back with languishing Eyes upon the Pleasures, Riches, and Honours of this Life? And though he boasts of more than human Strength, yet how does he sometimes sink below the Character and Dignity even of a Man? Ye Sons of God, for such ye say ye are, how do you die like the Children of Men, and how like is your End to theirs?

And what must we say of these Things? Is the Promise of God become of none Effect? Is Baptism sunk into mere outward Ceremony, and can no longer reach to the purifying the Heart and Mind? The Fact must not be disputed: It is too evident, at least in these our Days, that the Lives of Christians do not answer to the manifold Gifts and Graces bestowed on them: And it is as true, that this has given great Occasion to the Enemies of the Gospel to blaspheme, to ridicule the Grace of God, which seems to them to be no real, no useful Gift or Power. But then it is certain, on the other side, that these Prejudices have arisen from the mistaken Notions which Men have entertained concerning the Grace of God: Their Expectations have been groundless and unwarrantable: they have promised themselves more than ever God promised them; and then, finding that Grace is not what they expected and hoped it was, they rashly conclude that it is nothing; and argue against the Truth of God's Promises merely from the Vanity and Delusion of their own. If you expect that the Grace of God should ward off all Temptations from you, or rescue you from the Power and Influence of them, notwithstanding

notwithstanding your own Remissness and Want of Care; as well may you expect that Swords and Pistols should fight your Battles, subdue your Enemies, and conquer Countries for you, whilst your Soldiers lie dissolved in Ease and Luxury, and forget to use their Arms. The Graces of the Spirit are the Arms of a Christian, with which he is to enter the Lists against the Powers of Darkness; and are a certain Indication to us that God intends to call us to the Proof and Exercise of our Virtue: Why else does he give us this additional Strength? We had Strength enough of our own to sit still and do nothing: Had it been his Intention to remove us out of the Way of Temptation, and to place us out of Danger, our Weakness and our Security might well have stood together; and having no Enemy to fear, we should not have been in need of so powerful an Ally as the Spirit of God. But since our Dangers are great, and even necessary to the Trial of our Faith and patient Continuance in Well-doing, therefore are we supported and encouraged by the Assistance of God, *to fight the good Fight, and to endure Hardness as good Soldiers of Jesus Christ.* To this we are called by the Example of our Lord and Master, who being full of the *Holy Ghost* was led by the Spirit *to be tempted*: And this plainly intimates to us, that the more abundant Grace we receive, the more Reason we have to expect Trials and Temptations; and *that to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.*

And if this be the Case, as most certainly it is, we may, I think, as necessary Consequences deduce these two Things:

First, That the Temptations which good Men are exposed to, and often are forced to struggle hard with, are no Proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that

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his Favour and Kindness are in any Degree lessened toward them.

Secondly, That the Sins which Christians fall into, and continue in, are no Proof that they had not the Spirit and Grace sufficient to have preserved their Innocence.

Let us consider these two Cases. The Temptations which good Men are exposed to, and are forced often to struggle hard with, are no Proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his Favour and Kindness are in any Degree lessened toward them. And yet the Dread of this is but too common an Ingredient in the Temptations which good Men suffer under : It is that which always lies at bottom where there are any Symptoms of Despair ; and when an honest Soul is harassed with Doubts and Misgivings of Mind, and persecuted with dismal Thoughts and Fears, both of what is present, and what is to come, it is from this bitter Root, generally speaking, that all the Misery springs. Men are apt to imagine, that had they the Spirit of God, the Wicked One would either not dare to approach them, or, if he did, that they should soon be able to quench his fiery Darts, and to command him with Authority to get behind their Backs. But when the Temptation grows upon them, and though often repulsed, yet as often with redoubled Force renews the Assault ; then they begin to suspect themselves, to fear lest they are given up to Destruction, and deserted by the Spirit of God. And when these Fears possess the Heart, like Spies and Traitors got within the Town, they betray the Strength of it to the Enemy ; they stifle all the generous Thoughts of vigorous Opposition, and leave the Heart, thus bereaved of Courage and Constancy, and Fidelity to itself, an easy Prey to the Invader.

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The first Thing then necessary in our spiritual Warfare is rightly to apprehend our own Condition, and the Dangers and Difficulties we are to meet with; that when they come we may be under no Surprise, but may be able to stand firm, and collected both in Courage and in Counsel, to make our just Defence. And for this Purpose did the Author and Captain of our Salvation leave us his Example, that it might serve equally for our Instruction and Imitation. And hence we may learn, that our Temptations are so far from being a Proof that we want the Spirit of God, that they are rather a Proof of the contrary: *God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.* And therefore, if he suffers our Temptations to be great, he will administer Strength great in Proportion. For the first Part of our Saviour's Life, we read of no Temptations that beset him; but no sooner did he receive the Spirit, but he was led to be tempted. And how did it fare with him? He still conquered, and yet still was pursued. The Tempter, though baffled, gave not over, but addressed to him with new Art and Cunning, in Hopes still to prevail. Full forty Days was he under Trial, sifted in every Part, exposed to the Horrors of the Desert, to the Necessity of Hunger: But neither the Necessity of Hunger, nor the Horrors of Darkness, nor the forty Days Temptation, could move him from his stedfast Confidence and Trust in God. And who was it, I beseech you, that was left thus exposed to these cruel Trials and Temptations? Was it not He whom God but just before had by a Voice from Heaven declared *to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased?* And can you still think that your Temptations are any Signs that God has forsaken you, that he

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has at once withdrawn his Spirit and his Love from you? Can you think the Continuance of your Temptations any just Ground for Despair, when Christ himself was tempted forty Days? For forty Days without Intermission, was he tempted: How soon the Temptation was again renewed, how frequent or how long the Returns of it were, we cannot tell: But that the Tempter still pursued him, and watched all the Seasons and Opportunities of approaching him with Advantage, is plainly intimated by the Evangelist, in the thirteenth Verse of this Chapter; *And when the Devil had ended all the Temptation, he departed from him for a Season.* He departed, but, like an Enemy that is rather enraged than subdued by his Overthrow, he departed with Resolutions to try his Fortune again, and in his Flight he meditated his Return. Go, now, and complain, that your Life is full of anxious Care and Trouble, that every Day brings its Trial with it, and every Night its Temptation; and much you fear that God has withdrawn his Holy Spirit from you, and no longer regards you with the watchful Eye of a tender Father, but has given you up to uncertain Fears, to Anguish and Despair in this World, and to Ruin inevitable in the next: But when you remember that through all these Dangers and Difficulties Christ has led the Way, that he, like you, nay more than you, was tempted and exposed, you must blush at your Complaints, and with Confusion of Face confess, that you have charged God foolishly, and with the holy Psalmist say, *It is mine own Infirmity.*

Whatever you may think, there is more Reason to suspect yourself, and even to fear concerning the Love of God, when all Things are calm and serene about you, and when you stand as it were exempted from
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the common Burden of Life, your Body free from Pain, and your Mind from Care. One would be apt to suspect that the Enemy of Mankind thought himself secure of you, and that there wanted no Trials and Temptations to urge on your approaching Ruin: Else why should he neglect you only, whilst with the greatest Diligence and Application he is exercising with Tortures both bodily and spiritual all the rest of the Sons of God? The best and the only Thing we can say to this, is, That Prosperity itself is the greatest of Temptations, and the severest Trial of Virtue and Innocence; and that the Tempter leaves Men to sink under the Charms of Plenty and Indolence, as the surest Method he can make use of. And if this be so, I am sure our Ease and our Plenty call upon us for the utmost Diligence and Care, for the constant Exercise of all those Virtues that are proper to our Station. If we see others led to Virtue by Hardships and Poverty; let us reflect that we want those Tutors and Guides, and that instead of them we have only Charity and Humility to follow: By the Exercise of these we may reap the Fruit of the others, and at last be found in the Number of those who mourned with those who mourned.

If others struggle with Temptations of divers Kinds, and are perfected with Trials, whilst we enjoy an inward Peace and Rest of Soul, let us remember that we want the Advantages they have. And since God has not called us to resist Evil, as he has called others, he certainly expects that we should do more Good: It is their Business to defend their Virtue against the Assaults of Vice; but we, who enjoy a free and unmolested Virtue, must improve it in a constant Exercise and Discharge of all the Duties of Piety and Religion; in keeping a strict Hand over our Passions, that Pro-
sperity

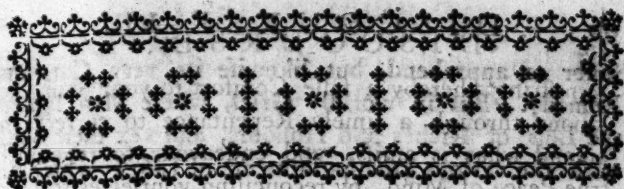
prosperity be not our Ruin. If others are forced to serve constantly upon the Guard, and to watch against the Encroachments of Vice, and have Work enough to secure an unblemished Innocence; we, who are placed in the inmost and securest Recesses of the Lord's Vineyard, where no Dangers can approach to molest and disturb our Peace; we, I say, ought to labour the more zealously to till and improve the Soil, that we may be able at the last to render a good Account of the Talent committed to our Use.

Secondly, It appears from the Circumstances of this History of our Lord's Temptation, that Trials and Temptations may be great and severe, where the Gifts and Graces of the Spirit are administered in the largest Proportion: And since those who are tempted may fall, for otherwise Temptations would be no Trials, it appears that those who have the Gifts of the Spirit, and Grace sufficient, may nevertheless fall into Sin through the Power of Temptations, and the Want of Care and Diligence on their own Part. It is a false Comfort therefore which Sinners administer to themselves, when they excuse their Sins by laying all the Blame upon their own natural Infirmities, and the Want of God's Grace to enable them to do well. God is never wanting to those who are not wanting to themselves; and though he suffers all to be tempted, yet it is with this Restriction upon the Tempter, that he tempt them not above what they are able to bear. The Instruction which I propose to you from this Consideration is this, That whenever you are so unhappy as to offend, you do not try to palliate and excuse your Offences, and charge God foolishly, as if he had been wanting to your Assistance; but that you rather consider your own Iniquity as your own, and instead of excusing your Sins, and administering

ministring thereby a false Comfort to your Soul, you labour through a timely Repentance to correct and amend what is amiss, and endeavour to regain the true Peace of Mind, by reconciling yourselves to God, and by a speedy and resolute Return to your Duty.

In a Word, it is no Man's Fault that he is tempted; it is the Condition of our spiritual Warfare; it is the Combat to which God calls us for the Proof and Trial of our Virtue. Then only are we guilty, when we give Way to Temptations, and forsake God to follow the Pleasures or the Gains of Wickedness. And whenever this is the Case, there is but one Remedy, Repentance through Faith in Christ Jesus, which will never be refused when it comes from a sincere Heart, touched with a lively Sense of God's Goodness and its own Unworthiness.





DISCOURSE VIII.



2 COR. vii. 10.

*Godly Sorrow worketh Repentance to Salvation not
to be repented of: but the Sorrow of the World
worketh Death.*

YOU have, in the Words of the Text, a
Character given you of Religious Sorrow,
and the Advantages of it set forth, and
illustrated by a Comparison between them
and the evil Effects of worldly Sorrow. Sorrow in all
Cases arises from the Conceit of Misery either present
or expected. When our Sorrow grows from the Con-
sideration of our spiritual Condition, from a Sense
of our own Iniquity, and the Pains of a guilty Mind;
from the Fear of God's Wrath and heavy Judgments
denounced against Sinners; which are the proper Ob-
jects of Religious Sorrow, and distinguish it from the
Grief of a worldly Mind, which reaches only to the
real or supposed Evils of this Life: In this Case,
Sorrow is not only the Consequence of the Evil we

suffer or apprehend, but likewise its very Cure and Remedy. But in worldly Grief, where Men lament the Loss of Riches and Honours, and vex their Souls with the various Disappointments of Life; which are perpetual Springs of Uneasiness to all whose Affections are wedded to the Pleasures and Enjoyment of the World; there Sorrow is a Remedy worse than the Disease, and adds Weight to our Misfortunes, which, could they be neglected, would not be felt.

It is the Glory of Philosophy to raise Men above the Misfortunes of Life, to teach them to look with Indifference upon the Pleasures of the World, and to submit with manly Courage and a steady Mind to those Calamities which no Care can prevent, and which no Concern can cure. Such are all the Miseries which are brought on us by a Change of Fortune, or the Necessity of human Condition. And the Considerations of Philosophy not extending beyond these Limits, it is no Wonder to find Wisdom placed in an Absence of Passion; and Grief and Sorrow, and all the tender Motions of the Mind, exposed as certain Marks of a slavish abject Spirit. But when the Reasons of Philosophy are transferred to the Cause of Religion, they lose their Name; and the same Conclusions, for want of the same Principles to support them, are foolish and absurd. In natural Evils, Sorrow and Grief of Mind give us the quickest and sharpest Sense of our Afflictions, and divest us of the Power of looking out for the proper Comforts and Supports: they increase and lengthen out our Misery; nor can the Mind ever lose Sight of its Afflictions, till Length of Time sets it free from Grief, or the very Excess of Sorrow so far stupefies the Sense of Feeling, that it destroys itself. And when it leaves us, often it carries off with it our
Strength

Strength and Health, and bequeaths to us a weak Body and a feeble Mind, and entails upon the very best Days of our Youth the very worst Infirmities of Age and Sickness: *For the Sorrow of the World worketh Death.* But in spiritual Evils, where Sin and Guilt threaten the Life of the Soul, and hasten to bring on us Death eternal, Sorrow is the best Indication of Life, and, like the Pulse in the natural Body, shews there is some Heat and Vigour still remaining: As it increases, it brings with it the Symptoms of Recovery; Sin and Guilt fly before it; Life and Immortality follow after it. And the Mind thus purged by religious Sorrow sends into the Heart fresh Streams of Pleasure, and abounds with all the Joys which the Sense of the Love of God, the present Possession of Peace, and the firm Expectation of future Glory can produce: *For Godly Sorrow worketh Repentance unto Salvation not to be repented of.* From the Consideration of these different Effects of worldly and of religious Sorrow, the Apostle with no less Truth than Art insinuates to the *Corinthians*, how truly he had acted the Part of a Friend towards them, in bringing them to a due Sense of Sorrow for the Sins they had committed. It is the Part of a Friend to ease our Minds of Grief, to step in between us and Sorrow, and to make us, as far as it is possible, forget our Misfortunes: Why then do the Ministers of Christ perpetually suggest new Fears to us, and still labour to awaken our Souls to a Sense of their Misery, and to fill us with Sorrow, by continually representing to us the Greatness of our Loss? To this let the Apostle answer for himself, and for all: *I rejoice not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to Repentance.* If from worldly Sorrow there can arise nothing but certain Pain and Misery, if the Anguish of Mind produces Feebleness of Body, and the lamenting

our past Misfortunes renders us incapable of the Enjoyments which are present, happy is the Man who can bear up against Afflictions, and with an undisturbed Mind submit to those Evils which no Sorrow can either ease or prevent. But if in godly Sorrow the Effects are just contrary, if Grief can blot out the Guilt of Sins past, and preserve us from the Infection for the Time to come; if it brings Ease to a wounded Spirit, and makes us to be at Peace with ourselves, and with God; if it renders Life comfortable, and Death not terrible; if it rids us of Fear for the present, and fills us with Hope full of future Glory: how happy then are they who go to the House of Mourning, and by a wise Choice escape the Punishment of Sin, by submitting to the Sorrow of it?

How these blessed Fruits grow out of godly Sorrow, will appear to you from the Apostle's Words in the Text, in which the Effects of godly and worldly Sorrow are fully expressed in few Words: *Godly Sorrow worketh Repentance unto Salvation not to be repented of; but the Sorrow of the World worketh Death.* In which Words you may observe, first, that Sorrow is distinguished from Repentance; for *godly Sorrow* is said to *work Repentance*, and is therefore supposed to have the same Relation to it that the Cause has to its Effect. Secondly, You may observe that *Sorrow* is not said to *work Salvation* immediately and of itself, but by the Means of that Repentance which it produceth. Thirdly, You may observe that *worldly Sorrow* is said to produce *Death* immediately: It brings forth nothing analogous to Repentance, but does indeed confirm and strengthen the evil Disposition from which it grows. Fourthly, The Death which is wrought by worldly Sorrow is opposed to the Salvation which follows Repentance; and may therefore signify eternal Death, as well

well as temporal; the Truth of the Proposition admitting either or both of these Explications. As I explain and enlarge these Observations, I shall take in what I judge necessary to give you a distinct Conception of the Nature of godly, and of worldly Sorrow, and to shew the Effects of both.

First, then, you may observe that Sorrow is distinguished from Repentance; for *godly Sorrow* is said to *work Repentance*, and is therefore supposed to bear the same Relation to it as the Cause does to its Effect. In common Speech we are apt to speak of Sorrow for Sin under the Name of Repentance, and to ascribe to it the Effects belonging only to Repentance: But the Apostle in the Verse before us has plainly another Notion of Repentance, since the common Notion would make an Absurdity in the Text; for if by Repentance you understand Sorrow for Sin, the Apostle must then be understood to say that godly Sorrow produces Sorrow for Sin; that is, that godly Sorrow produces itself, since that only is godly Sorrow which is upon the Account of Sin. Repentance therefore is distinct from Sorrow, and is wrought by it, and properly denotes a Change of Mind: Which is indeed the natural Effect of godly Sorrow, and the necessary Condition of Salvation; and must therefore be the true and genuine Explication of that Repentance which stands in the Middle between godly Sorrow and Salvation, as proceeding from one, and producing the other. And so distinct is this Change of Mind from Sorrow, that of all its Effects it is the happiest; Ease and Comfort attend on it, Joy and Hope flow from it. This is a Change *not to be repented of*; it can never cause us any Grief or Pain, or give us Reason to lament any Effect proceeding from it.

Sorrow then is not Repentance, though it be the Cause of Repentance in most Cases. The Alliance between them will be best explained by considering the Nature of Sorrow in general, and the Impressions it makes upon every Man's Mind. Whatever is the Cause of our Sorrow must needs be the Object of our Aversion; since to take Pleasure in the Thing that grieves us, and causes us Pain, is a Contradiction in Nature. Many Things occasion us Sorrow which are out of the Reach of our Power, which come without our seeking, and go without our bidding. In all these Cases Sorrow is an useless Passion, for the Aversion arising from it brings Torment without Security; for to what Purpose can our Love or our Concern serve, where the Objects are neither to be obtained or avoided by our utmost Care? Should we afflict ourselves with the Thoughts of Death, and raise in our Minds the utmost Horror and Dread, yet Death will move with the same Pace to us, not retarded by our Fears, or stopped by our Aversion. And this shews how ridiculous a Passion Sorrow is in all these Cases.

But where Good and Evil are set before us, and we are left to chuse for ourselves, if through Weakness or Folly, or the prevailing Power of any Passion, we have chosen amiss, the Pain we suffer from these Evils of our own inviting is the best Security for the future: We cannot lament the Folly of our Choice, without condemning ourselves for making it, and hating the Thing which has brought so much Sorrow along with it. This Self-Condempnation will teach us to correct our Choice for the future, this Aversion will turn the Stream of our Affections from the Thing which brings so much Misery with it. But this can extend but to very few Instances of worldly Concern, so little is there in our own Power; for which Reason worldly Sorrow can only make

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make us feel our Misfortunes, without enabling us to redress them. But in spiritual Concerns the Case is otherwise: Virtue and Vice are placed within our Choice; and we cannot do Evil till we have first determined ourselves to do it: And, when we have done it, the sooner our Minds recoil and grow sick of their unhappy Choice, so much the better; since the Correction of Folly is often the Parent of Wisdom, and the Misery we suffer through Vice the best Guide to the Paths of Virtue. Sin cannot be the Cause of our Sorrow, but it must likewise be the Object of our Aversion: The natural Consequence of which is Repentance, or a Change of Mind, by which we shall hate the Vices we once delighted in, and fly to the Arms of Virtue, to taste those Pleasures which Experience has taught us are there only to be found. And thus you see how naturally a Change of Mind arises from godly Sorrow, or Sorrow for Sin: which is a farther Confirmation of the Interpretation we have given of the Apostle's Words.

Secondly, *Godly Sorrow* is not said to *work Salvation* immediately and of itself, but by Means of that *Repentance*, or Change of Mind, which it produceth.

This shews you, that a Change of Mind, and consequently a Change of Life, is absolutely necessary towards the obtaining the Mercy and Forgiveness of God; and that it is to little Purpose to lament your Sins, unless you resolve to forsake them. So many are the sad Effects of Sin, with respect to our Health, our Reputation, and our Fortune in the World, which always suffer, and often sink, under the Oppression of Vice, that the Sinner who has no Fear of God before his Eyes has Reason enough to be sorry for his Sins. But Sorrow arising from these Motives is mere worldly Sorrow: One laments the Decay of his Health, another

the Loss of his Reputation, and a third the Ruin of his Fortune, and often one laments the Loss of All: And equally they would have lamented these Losses, had they come from any other Cause besides Sin. He that is sorry for his Sin because it has destroyed his Health, would have been as sorry had a Fever destroyed it; he that grieves for the Loss of his Fortune, would have grieved in the same Manner if Fire or the Rage of the Sea had been his Undoing. From whence it is plain, that in such Sorrow as this no Regard is had to God, whom we are principally to respect in our Repentance, as being the Person against whom we have offended, and whose Mercy and Pardon we labour to obtain.

In true Sorrow that produces Repentance, the Sense of our Guilt is a great Ingredient, as well as the Sense of our Misery. The very Hopes we have of obtaining Pardon at the Hand of God will fill our Minds with Indignation against ourselves for having offended so gracious a Master. For if we can think him good to forgive us, we must needs think ourselves wicked, and lost to all Sense of Gratitude and Goodness, that we could offend so kind and compassionate a Lord. From this Sense of Guilt will arise Indignation, and Fear, and Zeal; and every Passion will be roused to act its Part in making us hate and abhor ourselves and our Iniquities, and will never let us be at Peace with our own Hearts, till we have purged them of every evil Lust, and consecrated them anew to the Service of our Maker. And this is that blessed Change which is true Repentance *unto Salvation never to be repented of.*

Fear may sometimes prevail against the Power of Lust, and the Wretch who hates to think of God may not be able to exclude the Fear and Dread of him: When the Flames of Hell play before the Sinner's Eyes, and Guilt, conscious of its own Deserts, fills the Imagination

gination with all the Horrors of Damnation; in this Case there will never want Sorrow, though perhaps there be no Signs of Repentance. Thus *Judas* grieved, in his Grief he died, and in his Death he found the Pains of Hell.

In the Gospel there are no Promises made to Grief and Sorrow; the Mercies of God are offered upon the Condition of Repentance: And though in the Nature of the Thing Repentance must arise from Sorrow, and therefore Sorrow may be esteemed as a Part of Repentance; yet Sorrow that produces not Repentance, that is, a thorough Change and Reformation, is of no Account in the Sight of God. Such Sorrow may be the Sinner's Due; if he suffers under it, he has but his Reward; it is the just Punishment of his Iniquity, but can never be the Condition of his Pardon.

One would think this were too plain a Case to be mistaken; yet so commonly it is mistaken, that Repentance is grown almost into a Form and Method, and instead of reforming their Sins, Men set themselves so many Days to be sorry for them. Alas! it is a fruitless Grief they labour to affect themselves with; and they may assure themselves their Hopes of Pardon will be as empty and delusive as their Sorrow. Were you truly sensible of your Guilt, there would need no Art to produce Sorrow, you would want no Rules to limit your Grief by; Nature would be your best Instructor, and teach you to lament your Misery and your Guilt with unsought-for Tears and Groans: Were you sincere, you would fly the Viper that had stung you, and not cherish and caress the Beast, whilst with false Tears you bathe the Wound you have received.

Godly Sorrow is that which respects God. This Sorrow will always produce Repentance, and be followed by Salvation, in Virtue of the many Promises of

God, by which we are assured that when the Sinner is converted, and turns to the Lord, forsaking the Evil of his Ways, *he shall save his Soul alive.*

Repentance unto Life is the Gift of God to a sinful World, and the greatest that Heaven ever bestowed on it: For though Nature is no Stranger to the Grief and Sorrow of Repentance, yet is Repentance our Title to Life through the Gospel of Christ Jesus. And therefore, when the *Gentiles* were admitted to be Partakers of the Gospel, and the News thereof was brought to the Apostles and Brethren at *Jerusalem*, they bless God for his great Goodness in having granted to the *Gentiles* also Repentance unto Life.

The Nature of this godly Sorrow we shall still better understand, by comparing it with worldly Sorrow, and shewing the Difference between them.

Thirdly, then, you may observe that *worldly Sorrow* is said immediately to *work Death*: It brings forth nothing analogous to Repentance, but does confirm and strengthen the evil Disposition from which it grows.

There is such a Connexion between the Passions, that one cannot be powerfully set on work, but it must move and engage the others in their several Spheres. Thus the Apostle, in the Chapter of my Text, tells us that the godly Sorrow of the *Corinthians* produced Fear and Indignation, Zeal and vehement Desire, and Revenge. And thus it must be: Whatever afflicts us is the Object of our Hatred and Fear; whatever we lament the Loss of, that we must needs vehemently desire and long after; and our Grief for the Loss will rouse us to recover, if possible, the Thing we lament for. This being agreed, you need only consider the Causes from which worldly Sorrow and godly arise, to see the Workings of both, and the different Effects which they must produce. The covetous Man laments

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for the Loss of his Wealth, or regrets that his Gains have been no larger: What must the Consequence be? This Grief will produce no Change in him: Covetous he was before, his Sorrow for his Wealth will make him still more so: His Industry to grow rich will be inflamed by his Sorrow, his Concern not to part with what is left will increase by his Anxiety, and he will be ten times more a Slave to the World, than ever he was before. Consider the ambitious Man's Disappointment, and his Sorrow that flows from it; the Case will be still the same: How will his Vexation urge him to repair his Defeat, and make him perhaps divest himself entirely of all the Regards to Good and Evil; Virtue and Vice, especially if he has once found them to stand in his Way? Thus, you see, in all Cases worldly Sorrow confirms the evil Habits from which it grows, and is therefore the most direct Way to Death.

For the like Reason godly Sorrow will lead to Life; for Sin being the Cause of Sorrow, all the Passions will be moved to dispossess it: Hope, and Fear, and Zeal, and vehement Desire, will unite their Force to throw out Sin, which stands in the Way of all their Views. From whence must proceed an entire Change of the Man, and he that is heartily sorry for his Sins will most certainly forsake them.

In godly Sorrow we grieve for having enjoyed too much of the World to the Hazard of losing the more valuable Pleasures of Immortality: In worldly Sorrow we lament our having had too little of the World. It is evident then that Sorrow in one Case will make us fly the World and its Allurements; in the other it will render us but the more eager to pursue and overtake them. In one Case, Sorrow does as it were new-make the Man, gives him new Desires and Dispositions of Mind, teaches him to shun the Pleasures he once em-

braced with eager Appetite, and to seek new Joys and Comforts which before he was a Stranger to: In the other Case, Grief confirms the old Habits, quickens the old Desires, and makes a Man ten times more worldly-minded than he was before; so that his last State is even worse than his first. And this will appear by considering, in the last Place,

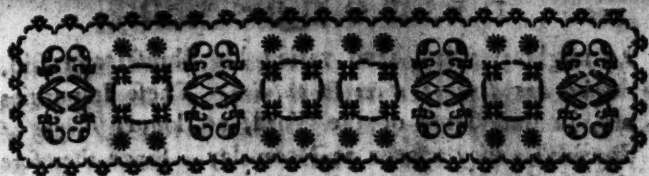
Fourthly, That the Death which is wrought by worldly Sorrow is opposed to the Salvation which follows Repentance, and may therefore signify eternal Death as well as temporal, the Truth of the Proposition admitting either or both of these Explications.

The natural Effect of Grief, considered as such, is to waste and impair the Strength, to deaden the Faculties of the Mind, and to make a Man useless to himself and his Friends: So that where this Passion inflamed to any Degree has been long in Possession, it leaves nothing of the Man, but the outward Form, and hardly that. This, I say, is the Effect of Sorrow in general: But then here lies the Difference between godly Sorrow and worldly Sorrow: The first, in every Step, tends to Peace and Joy, and its most natural Effect is to destroy itself, and leave the Mind in perfect Ease and Tranquillity. The Sinner's Tears, though they spring from Grief, are yet the most sovereign Cordial to an afflicted Heart, and like Showers in Summer portend a cooler and more refreshing Air. But worldly Sorrow knows no Rest, it has no Period; it still urges Men to new Pursuits after the World, and the World has new Disappointments in reserve to baffle all their eager Care. Every Disappointment is a new Occasion of Grief; and the whole Gain of this Passion for the World, being fairly computed, amounts to this, *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*. Thus the Case stands if we regard only the Comforts of this Life. The Sorrow
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for Sin produces the Pleasure of Righteousness, which is a perpetual Spring of Joy and spiritual Consolation: Whilst the worldly Man, pursuing false Enjoyments, is ever reaping real Torments. But if we change the Scene, and look into the other World, the Difference grows wider still: The Time is coming when the Tears of Repentance shall be wiped away, when the Sinner's Grief shall stand between him and Judgment, and the Shame which he took to himself shall protect him from Shame at the great Appearance of the World. But worldly Sorrow will then have an heavy Account to pass; those guilty Tears which were shed for transitory Pleasures of Mortality will stand in Judgment against you, and exclude you from the Joys of that Life which is for evermore.

The Confusion and Distress of that Time will be more than I can describe, or you imagine; they will exceed even the Fears of Guilt, and be more gloomy than even Despair could ever paint them. The whole is comprised in the Words of the Text, *The Sorrow of the World worketh Death.*





DISCOURSE IX.

PART I.

I. PETER ii. 11.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as Strangers and Pilgrims, abstain from fleshly Lusts, which war against the Soul.

THE Exhortations of Scripture to abstain from fleshly Lusts, or Lusts of the Flesh, are so many, the Expression itself is so familiar to Christians, and so well understood, that there is no need, I think, of many Words to explain the Subject Matter of the Advice now before us. Some Sins are privileged by their Impurity from being exposed as they deserve: A modest Tongue cannot relate, nor a modest Ear receive an Account, without great Pain, of the various Kinds of Lewdness practised in the World: For as the Apostle to the *Ephesians* remarks, *It is a Shame even to speak of those Things which are done of them in secret.* Had he lived in our Times,

he might perhaps have varied his Phrase, and said, *which are done of them in publick.* These Impurities are, in one Sense of the Word, no longer *Works of Darkness*, they appear at Noon-day. Since therefore they no longer affect to be disguised, they will speak for themselves what they are: I have no Mind to speak for them.

The Apostle in the Text has pointed out to us the common Source from whence Vices of this kind proceed; they arise from *fleshy Lusts*: Words which carry a Reason in them, to all who value their Reason, not to give themselves up to the Dominion of Appetites, made not to govern, but to serve the Man. But Reason, when it becomes a Slave to Vice, must do the Drudgery of Vice, and support its Cause: And therefore, upon this Topic, Vice has borrowed some Assistance from Reason, and made a Shew of arguing in its own Defence. These *fleshy Lusts*, as the Scripture calls them, others are willing to call natural Desires: And then the Question is asked, How it becomes so heinous an Offence to comply with the Desires which God, for wise Reasons, has made to be Part of the Nature which he has given us? Were this Question asked in Behalf of the Brute Creatures, we would readily answer, We accuse them not: But when Man asks it in his own Behalf, he forgets that he has another Question to answer before he can be intitled to ask this, For what Purpose was Reason and Understanding given to Man? Brutes have no higher Rule to act by than these Instincts and natural Impressions; and therefore, in acting according to these, they act up to the Dignity of the Nature bestowed on them, and are blameless. But can you say the same of Man? Does he act up to the Dignity of his Nature, when he makes that his Rule which is common to him and the Beasts; when he pursues
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the same Inclinations, and with as little Regard to Virtue and Morality? Why is Man distinguished from the Brute Creatures by so superior a Degree of Reason and Understanding, by a Knowledge of moral Good and Evil, by a Notion of God his Creator and Governor, by a certain Expectation of Judgment, arising from a Sense of his being accountable, if after all there is but one Rule of acting for him and for the Beasts that perish? Let these Desires be natural; yet tell me, Does the Addition of Reason make no Difference? Is a Creature endowed with Knowledge at Liberty to indulge his Desires with the same Freedom, as a Creature that has no Reason to restrain it? If this be absurd, it is to little Purpose to plead that the Desires are natural, since we have Reason given us to direct them, and are not at Liberty to do whatever Appetite prompts us to do, but must in all Things consider what is reasonable and fit for us to do: For surely there is no Case in which a reasonable Creature may renounce the Direction of Reason.

It will be farther urged, To what Purpose were these Desires given, which are apparently the Cause of much Mischief and Iniquity in the World, and oftentimes a great Disturbance to the best in a Life of Religion? In reply to this, it will be necessary to consider how far these Desires are natural.

If we look into Mankind, we shall find that the Desires which are common, and therefore may be called natural, are such as are necessary to the Preservation of Individuals, and such as are necessary for the Preservation of the Species. At the same time that we find these natural Desires, we discover the Ends which Nature has to serve by them; and Reason from thence discerns the true Rule for the Government and Direction of them. Our Bodies are so made, that they cannot

not be supported without constant Nourishment: Hunger and Thirst therefore are natural Appetites given us to be constant Calls to us to administer to the Body the necessary Supports of the Animal Life. Ask any Man of common Sense now, how far these Appetites ought to be indulged; he cannot help seeing that Nature calls for no more than is proper for the Health and Preservation of the Body, and that Reason prescribes the same Bounds; and that when these Appetites are made Occasions of Intemperance, an Offence is committed against as well the Order of Nature, as the Rule of Reason. The Excess therefore of these Appetites is not natural but vicious: The intemperate Man is not called upon by his natural Appetites, but he does, in Truth, call upon them to assist his Sensuality, and often loads them so hard that they recoil, and nauseate what is obtruded upon them. An habitual Drunkard may have, and has, I suppose, an uncommon Craving upon him; but the Excess of his Craving is not natural: It is not of God's making, but of his own, the Effect of a long practised Intemperance: And such an Appetite will be so far from being an Excuse, that it is itself a Crime.

In other Instances of a like Nature, they who have inflamed Desires, commonly owe the Excess of them to their own Misconduct. There is a great deal of Difference between Men of the same Temper, where one shuns, and where the other seeks the Temptation; where one employs his Wit to minister to his Appetite, and the other uses his Reason to subdue it: The Passions of one, by being used to Subjection, are taught to obey; the Appetites of the other, knowing no Restraint, take fire upon every Occasion; and the corrupted Mind, instead of opposing, endeavours to heighten as well the Temptation as the Sin: And
often

often it is seen, that the Relish for the Sin outlasts the Temptation: A plain Evidence that there is a greater Corruption in sensual Men than can be charged upon natural Inclination.

Since therefore the Desires of Nature are in themselves innocent; and ordained to serve good Ends; since God has given us Reason and Understanding to moderate and direct our Passions; it is in vain to plead our Passion in Defence or Excuse of Sensuality, unless at the same time we could plead that we were void of Reason, and had no higher Principle than Passion to influence our Actions: For if it be the Work of Reason to keep the Passions within their proper Bounds, the reasonable Creature must be accountable for the Work of his Passion. And so the Case is in human Judicatures: Anger and Revenge, Pride and Ambition, are very headstrong Passions, and the Cause of great Mischief in the World; but they cannot be alledged in excuse of the Iniquity they produce, because the Reason of the Offender makes him liable to answer for the Extravagance of his Passion. Take away Reason, and bring a Madman or an Ideot into Judgment, and the Magistrate has nothing to say to him, whatever his Passions, or the Effects of them, may be.

It is the Work of Reason then to preside over the Passions: And seeing it is so, let us consider what great Motives we have to guard against the Irregularities of them. St. Peter is very earnest in the Exhortation of the Text, *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as Strangers and Pilgrims, abstain from fleshly Lusts, which war against the Soul.* Here are two Things offered to our Consideration as Motives:

First, That we are *Strangers and Pilgrims*, and ought therefore to abstain from fleshly Lusts.

Secondly,

Secondly, That *fleshly Lusts war against the Soul*, and therefore we ought to abstain from them. I shall consider them in their Order.

First, We are *Strangers and Pilgrims*, and ought therefore to abstain from *fleshly Lusts*.

St. Peter directs this Epistle to the *Strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*; which has led some to think that he applies to them in the Text under the same Notion, and calls them *Strangers and Pilgrims* upon account of their Dispersion upon the Earth: But I see no Force in the Exhortation upon this View. With respect to Religion and Morality, there is no more Reason to abstain from Vice in a foreign Country than in your own. There may possibly be sometimes prudential Reasons for so doing: But this is too narrow and too mean a Consideration, for an Apostle of Christ to build so weighty an Exhortation on it, as that of the Text. We must look out therefore for a more proper Meaning of these Words, and more suitable to the Occasion. And we need not look far for it: In the first Chapter of this Epistle, Verse 17, St. Peter thus exhorts, *If you call on the Father, who without respect of Persons judgeth according to every Man's Work, pass the Time of your sojourning here with Fear*. It is plain that St. Peter here calls the Time of Life the Time of our sojourning here; and consequently reckons us to be Strangers and Pilgrims as long as we are in this World. In the same Sense the Author to the Hebrews speaks of the Saints of old, *These all died in Faith, not having received the Promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth*, Heb. xi. 13. This Notion extends to all Mankind, and shews that the Apostle looked

looked upon them all as Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth: Consequently the Exhortation founded upon this Notion extends to all alike, and reaches as far as the Obligations of Morality reach. And this Consideration, placed in this View, has great Weight in it, with respect to all who have Faith enough to *desire a better, that is, an heavenly Country*, and to know themselves to be but only Passengers through this World, and on their Way to *a City prepared for them*. This is putting all our Hopes and Fears, with respect to Futurity, in balance against the Solicitations of sensual Pleasure: This is appealing to our Reason, to shew us how absurd it is to give ourselves up to momentary Enjoyments, in a Place where we have no certain Abode, at the Hazard of forfeiting our Right to that Country where we have an Inheritance which shall endure for ever. Wise Travellers do not use so to entangle themselves in the Affairs of foreign Countries, as to cut off all Hopes of a Return to their own Home: Such especially as belong to a Country in no Respect to be rivalled by any other Place, and are intitled to a large Share of the Wealth and Honour of it; such, I say, will not suffer their Thoughts and Cares to be so engaged Abroad as to forget their own Inheritance, which waits to be enjoyed, and which, once enjoyed, will recompence all the Fatigues and Hazards of the Journey. But this Comparison conveys to our Minds but a faint Image of the Case before us: One Country may differ from another, but no one differs so much from another as to represent to us the Difference between Heaven and Earth. Many are intitled to great Degrees of Honour and Riches in their own Countries; but no Man is intitled to so much on Earth as every Man is intitled to in Heaven, if he forfeits not his Hopes by sacrificing

sacrificing them to the mean and low Enjoyments of the World. Put the Case, that a Man was so framed by Nature as to hold out a thousand Years in his native Air, and to be hourly in Danger of Death in foreign Parts, and at best able to hold out but to sixty or eighty Years at most: How eagerly would such a Man press homewards, if ever he found himself in another Country? How would he despise the strongest Temptations of Pleasure that should pretend to stay him but a Day? How contemptible would all the Honours and Glories and Riches of foreign Kingdoms appear to him, when put in the Balance against the secure and long Life to be enjoyed at home? Add to this Supposition one Circumstance more, That the Man is by Nature made for the Enjoyments which his own Country only can afford, That all the Pleasures elsewhere to be found are attended with Pain and Uneasiness in the Pursuit, liable to many Vexations and Disappointments; the Enjoyment of them turbulent and transient, the Remembrance of them irksome and oftentimes tormenting: In this Case what would a wise Man do? Would he not reject with Disdain such Enjoyments as these, and call up all the Strength of his Mind, summon all the Powers of Reason, to withstand Temptations so destructive to his natural and real Happiness?

But what Need to dwell on Suppositions, when the Truth of our Case, fairly represented, will appear in a stronger Light than any Supposition can place it?

If we have immortal Souls, and that we have Nature speaks within us, this Place we are sure is not their native Country: Nothing immortal can belong to this Globe, where all Things tend to decay; which shall itself be one Day consumed, and this beautiful

beautiful Order be succeeded by a new Confusion and another Chaos. Were this the only Place to which we have Relation, we might justly complain of Nature for the sad Provision she has made for Man: He only, of all the Creatures of this lower World, wants an Happiness suited to his Capacity. The rest of the Creatures seem satisfied and happy, to the full Measure of their Capacities, by the Provision made for them. Man alone finds no true Enjoyment here, but is ever restless, and in pursuit of something more than this World can give. If something more is in reserve for him, his Desires are well suited to his Condition, and the Wisdom of God is discernible in giving Man Desires fitted for nobler Enjoyments than this Life affords, since for Man much nobler Enjoyments are prepared. These Desires are given to be a constant Call to him to remember the Dignity of his Creation, and to look forward to the better Hopes of a better World; and to govern and restrain the Appetites, which, too freely indulged, set him upon a Level with the Brutes, and disqualify him for the Happiness proper to rational Beings.

Taking this to be the Case, what is it a wise Man has to do, but to get as well through this World as he can; I had almost said as fast as he can, that he may arrive at those Enjoyments in reserve for him, which will yield a full as well as an endless Satisfaction? What can he think of the Pleasures of this World, but that they are below the Care of him who is born to so great Expectations? Thus he must think even of innocent Delights; they are frail, transitory, and uncertain, he is immortal: These therefore are but unworthy Objects of his Desires; fit to be used, but too mean to be courted; proper for his Diversion, but never good enough to become his Business,

finess, or to employ his Thoughts in the Pursuit of them. But guilty Pleasures, the sensual Enjoyments and Pollutions of the World, appear to him in a more ugly Form: He is upon the Way, hastening to the Place where his Heart is fixed: Sensual Pleasures are Robbers which frequent his Road, and lie in wait to take away his Life and his Treasure: These he will fly, for they are dangerous, and he has all his Wealth about him; even his Hopes and Expectations of Immortality, which die away if once he falls into the Snares of Sensuality.

Consider this Case fairly, look to the Glory and Immortality which are placed before you, and the everlasting Habitation prepared for those who serve their Maker in Holiness, and keep themselves unspotted from the World: Then view the Temptations which surround you, which would fix you down to this World, and intercept all your Hopes; and tell me what more powerful Argument there can be to abstain from fleshly Lusts than this, that ye are Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth, and look for another, even an heavenly Habitation.

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, say the Disciples of *Epicurus*: Commendable in this, that their Exhortation is suitable to their Principle. There is no Inconsistency in exhorting Men to make the best of this World and the Pleasures of it, when you teach them there is no other to be expected: But surely it is to the highest Degree absurd to teach the same Doctrine, without asserting the same Principle. There is not common Sense in saying, Let us eat and drink, for after this Life we shall enter upon another without End. Yet this is the wise Exhortation which every Man makes, who pretends to believe a future State, and yet pleads for a Liberty

to indulge his Appetites in this. Yes, say you: But God, who knows what he has prepared for us hereafter, has yet given these Appetites: And how can it be so inconsistent with our future Expectations to gratify our Appetites at present, since our Appetites as well as our Expectations are natural, and both derived from the same Original? This is the Capitol of the Cause, the darling Argument of the sensual Man. But suppose this World to be a State of Trial; suppose these Appetites to be given partly for the Proof of our Virtue, how will the Consequence stand then? God has given us Appetites for the Trial of our Virtue, therefore we may indulge our Appetites without any Regard to Virtue: How? No Man surely can reason thus: It can never follow that we are at Liberty to sin, because God has thought fit to call us to a Trial of our Virtue. But if God has given us Appetites, and made it Part of our Trial to govern and restrain them within the Bounds of Temperance and Justice, and you will nevertheless infer, that because God has given these Appetites, we may therefore indulge them to the utmost; what is it but making that a Licence to Sin, which God and Nature intended for a Trial of Virtue?

But you will insist farther perhaps and ask, How it is consistent with God's Goodness to work such Temptations as these into the very Nature of Mankind? A notable Question! But if you attend to it, it comes to this: How is it consistent with God's Goodness to make any thing that is not absolutely perfect, to make rational Creatures, for Instance, capable of doing amiss? The Question, I say, comes to this, or else there is nothing in it: For if God may make Creatures not absolutely perfect, but capable of sinning, there is no greater Objection against putting the Trial

of their Virtue upon their natural Appetites, than upon any other Weakness or Infirmary: And some Infirmary there must be in every Creature capable of offending, and thereby capable of a Trial. Had we no Desires that could incline us to do amiss, we should be above a State of Trial: And if it is lawful to indulge all our Desires upon this Pretence, that they are natural, it is evident we cannot do amiss in following our Desires, and consequently we are not in a State of Trial. What hitherto we have called Temptations to Sin, are in Truth Justifications of it; for Temptations act upon our Desires, and our Desires cannot lead us wrong: And if so, every base Action is justified by the Temptation that produces it; and no Man can sin but when he is forced to do something against his Inclination. This Plea, drawn from natural Desires, is, I know, made use of to justify one Kind of Wickedness particularly: But surely this is very partial Dealing; for I see no Reason why Pride, Ambition, and Avarice should be excluded the Benefit of it. Have Pride, Ambition, and Avarice no Desires; or are they all unnatural? It would be well for the World if they were, but the Case is otherwise: Mankind are of a Nature subject to these Desires as well as others; and upon the Foot of this Plea we may make Saints, as well as Heroes, of all the great Disturbers of the World.

To conclude: The Desires of Nature are ordained to serve the Ends of Nature: Reason is given to Man to govern the lower Appetites, and to keep them within their proper Bounds: In this consists the Virtue of Man: This is the Trial to which he is called; and the Prize contended for is nothing less than Immortality. If we indulge ourselves to the utmost in this World, our Enjoyments must be very short-lived, since

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we are ourselves but of a short Continuance on Earth ; but the next Scene that opens will present us with a State that never changes, either happy or miserable, according as we behave here. In this World we have little Interest, no abiding Place ; and ought therefore to pass through it with the Indifference of Travellers, whose Affections are placed on their native Country. This is the View the Apostle had before him in giving the Exhortation contained in the Text, *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as Strangers and Pilgrims abstain from fleshly Lusts, which war against the Soul.*



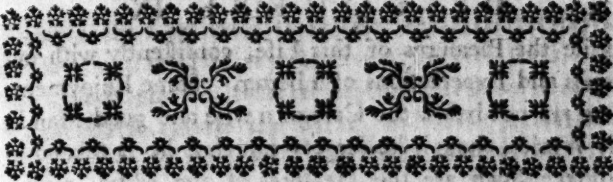
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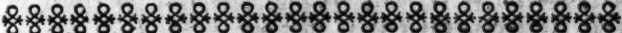
PART II.

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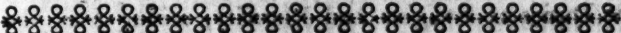
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DISCOURSE IX.



PART II.



 HE Apostle in the Text enforces his Exhortation to *abstain from fleshly Lusts* by two Considerations, which yet are near allied to each other. He calls upon us to remember that we are Strangers and Pilgrims here on Earth, and consequently that we have a better and a dearer Interest in another Country, which ought by no Means to be neglected for the Sake of the low and mean Enjoyments which this World affords. Whoever allows the Principle must needs allow the Consequence. If we are related to two Worlds, if this present be in all Respects inconsiderable, compared to the other, no Reason can justify or excuse us in sacrificing our Interest in the other World to the Allurements and Temptations to be met with in this.

This being allowed leads us to an Inquiry worthy of all the Pains we can bestow on it, How far we may

pursue the Pleasures of this Life, consistently with our Hopes and Expectations of a better. Some Enjoyments there are not below the Care of a wise and good Man in this World, though he forgets not that he is related to another: Such are the Pleasures of the Mind, arising from the Exercise of Reason: Such are, in a lower Degree, the Pleasures which our Senses furnish, whilst used within the Bounds of Temperance, and so restrained as not to be prejudicial to ourselves and others. Whenever our Appetites become so much too strong for our Reason, as to carry us into Offences in either of these Respects, then it is that our *fleshy Lusts do war against the Soul*. If we violate the Laws of Justice and Equity, to make Way for the Gratification of our Passions; or if we render ourselves incapable of discharging the Duties of Religion and Morality, arising from the Relation we bear to God and Man; we wound our own Souls, and, for the Sake of momentary Pleasures, expose ourselves to Death eternal.

It ought to be a sufficient Argument to Christians, to shew them the express Command of the Gospel against Drunkenness, Fornication, Adultery, and Vices of the like Nature: For since the Command comes from him who has Power to execute his Decrees, and the Penalty of them, upon every Offender; to transgress such Injunctions so given must discover a Want of Faith, as well as a Want of Virtue. But the Apostle in the Text goes farther, and exhorts us to *abstain from fleshy Lusts*, by laying before us the Reason in which the Command to abstain is founded: Was there no Difference between abstaining and not abstaining; was the Man who gives a Loose to his Passions, and indulges them to the utmost, in as fair a Way to Happiness as he who governs and restrains them, and bounds them on every Side by the Rules of Justice and Equity;

Equity; the Command to abstain would be merely arbitrary, and void of any Reason to support itself. But the Case is not so: Sensual Enjoyments have a natural Tendency to debase the Mind, to render it incapable of discharging its proper Functions, and unworthy of the Happiness to which it is ordained; for *fleshy Lusts war against the Soul*: For which Reason we are commanded to abstain from them; for which Reason we ought to abstain from them, though the Command had not intervened.

If you consider wherein the Dignity of Man consists, and what are the Means put into his Hands to make himself happy, you will have a clear Prospect of the ill Effects of sensual Lusts, and see how truly they war against the Soul.

There is no Occasion to carry you into any abstracted Speculations upon this Subject; it will be sufficient to the Purpose to make use of the Observations which common Sense will furnish.

There is no Man so little acquainted with himself, but that he sometimes finds a Difference between the Dictates of his Reason, and the Cravings of Appetite; between the Things which he would do, and the Things which he knows he ought to do. This Discord is the Foundation of the Difference to be observed among Men with Regard to their moral Character and Behaviour. When Men give themselves up to follow their Appetites, and have no higher Aim than the Gratification of their Passions, all the Use they have of their Reason is to administer to their Senses in contriving Ways and Means to satisfy them. Where this is the Case, consider what a Figure a Man makes: He has Appetites in common with the Brute Creatures, and is led by them as much as they; only the Reason he has enables him to be more brutish than they, and

to run into greater Excesses of Sensuality, than mere natural Appetites, without the Help and Assistance of Reason to contrive for them, can arrive to.

If our Passions are to govern us, and the Office of Reason is only to be subservient, and to furnish Means and Opportunities of gratifying the Desires, it will be very hard to account for the Wisdom of God in making such a Creature as Man. If we have no higher Purposes to serve than the Brute Creatures, why have we more Understanding than they? We see that they do not want more Reason than they have to follow their Appetites; they move regularly as they are moved, and pursue constantly the Path marked out by Nature. It would be well if we could say as much for some sensual Men; but they are ten times more mischievous to the World, than they could possibly be, if they had only Appetites, and no Reason: For Appetites, unassisted by a Power of contriving, could be guilty of no Treachery, no Breach of Trust; of no Schemes to overreach, defraud, and undo Multitudes, and a thousand other Wickednesses, which sensual worldly Men are daily guilty of, and will be guilty of, as long as their Reason is employed to promote the Ends of their Passion. So that, considering the Case with respect to this World only, the sensual Man, who gives himself to be conducted by his Appetites, is a more mischievous, a more odious Creature, and a greater Reproach to his Maker, than any of the Brutes; which he may perhaps despise, but ought indeed to envy, for being irrational.

From hence it is evident in what Manner sensual Lusts do war against the Soul, considered as the Seat of Reason, and all the nobler Faculties; in the due Use and Improvement of which the Dignity of Man consists. If we look into the Ages past, or into the present, we shall want

want no Instances of the pernicious Effects of Passion, assisted by a corrupt and depraved Reason. The Miseries which Men bring upon themselves and others are derived from this Fountain; and these Miseries, which we provide for ourselves and others, will be found, upon a fair Computation, to make nine Parts out of ten of all the Evil which the World feels and complains of. *From whence come Wars and Fightings among you?* says St. James: *Come they not hence, even of your Lusts, which war in your Members?* He might have added to his Catalogue many Iniquities more, and repeated the same Question and Answer: For, Whence proceed Jealousies, Suspicions, the Violations of Friendship, the Discord and Ruin of private Families? Whence comes Murder, Violence, and Oppression? Are these the Works of Reason given us by God? No, they are the Works of Sensuality, and of a Reason made the Slave of Sensuality. Were all who are given to such Works as these to be deprived of their Reason, the World about them would be much happier, themselves more harmless, and I think too, not less honourable. So effectually do sensual Lusts war against the Soul, that it would be better for the World, and not worse for the Sensualist, if he had no Soul at all.

But to be more particular. Let us consider that the only Part of Man, capable of any Improvement, is the Soul. It is little or nothing we can do for the Body, and if we could do more it would be little worth. We cannot add to our Stature, and if we could, where would be the Advantage? The Affections, which have their Seat in the Body, can yield us no Honour: They are capable of no Improvement; the higher they rise, the more despicable we grow: They can yield us neither Profit nor Credit, but only when we conquer and subdue them. If therefore we have any Ambition of being

better than we are in any Respect, either in this World or in the next, we must cultivate the Mind, the only Part of us capable of any Improvement.

The Excellency of a rational Creature consists in Knowledge and Virtue, one the Foundation of the other: These are the Things we ought to labour after: But sensual Lusts are great Impediments to our Improvement in either of these, and do therefore properly war against the Soul.

As to Knowledge, the best and most useful Part of it is the Knowledge of ourselves, and of the Relation we stand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures, and of the Duties and Obligations arising from these Considerations. Now this Knowledge is such an Enemy to sensual Lusts, that a sensual Man will be very much indisposed to receive it. It is Self-condemnation to him to admit the Principles of this Knowledge; and therefore his Reason, as long as it continues in the Service of his Passion, will be employed to discredit such Knowledge as this, and if possible to subvert and overthrow the Principles upon which it stands. Hence proceed the many Prejudices to be met with in the World against the first Principles of Natural Religion; the many laboured Arguments to destroy the very Distinction of Soul and Body, and all Hopes of a future Existence: Such hard Masters are the Lusts of the Flesh! They compel the Soul to deny itself, to resign all its Pretensions to present or future Happiness, in Condescension to the Passions and Appetites of the Body. Take out of the Composition of a Man the Inclinations to sensual Pleasures, and he must needs rejoice to hear of another Life in which he may be for ever happy. If he sees not so much Reason as to be sure of living for ever, yet he will be willing to hope he may, and his Mind will be always open to receive whatever may strengthen and support

support such Hopes. But the sensual Man sees nothing that such a future State can afford him but Misery and Destruction; therefore he shuts his Eyes against the Light, and places a Guard over his Mind, to secure it from such unwelcome Thoughts. He hopes, he believes, at last he comes to demonstrate, that Souls, and Spirits, and future States, are mere idle Dreams, the Inventions either of Fools or of Politicians.

If the Fear of God be in Truth, as in Truth it is, the Beginning of Wisdom, Sensuality cuts us off from all Hopes of Improvement, considered as rational Beings, by choaking the Spring from whence all Wisdom flows. It ties us down to the World, it materializes the Soul, and makes it incapable of any noble Thoughts or Conceptions worthy itself. And thus Men, by following the sensual Enjoyments of the World, become carnal in their Minds, as well as in their Bodies; and instead of a Reason qualifying them to be Servants of God, the highest Honour of which a rational Being is capable, they get a low Cunning to serve themselves and the worst of their own Desires, which differs but little from the strong Instincts to be found in Creatures of a lower Order; but little, I mean, in point of Excellency, though in another Respect it differs much. The Creatures answer the Ends of their Nature, and are guiltless in pursuing their several Instincts; but the sensual Man is useless to himself, injurious to the World, and, as far as in him lies, brings a Reproach upon the Hand that made him. For,

Secondly, Virtue and Morality are the distinguishing Characters of rational Beings; but these will always be lost where the Appetites have Dominion.

In all Cases where our Thoughts are confined to ourselves, and we aim at no other End than our own In-

terest or Pleasure, we act upon a Principle destructive of Morality. The Ability we have of extending our Views beyond ourselves, and considering what is fit and proper and reasonable with regard to others, is the Foundation of Morality. It is not perhaps a total Want of Reason that renders Brutes incapable of Morality; but whatever Reason they have, it is confined to themselves, and exercised only with regard to their own Wants and Desires, and this renders them immoral Agents. Now every Degree of Sensuality is an Approach to this State: The sensual Man labours in the Gratification of his own Passions, and has no other End than to serve himself, nay the worst Part of himself, in all his Actions. This makes him overlook what is due to others, and to cast behind him all Regards to Justice, Equity, and Compassion, in the Eagerness of obtaining the Object of his Desires. Hence it is that the covetous Man is apt to defraud all he deals with, to betray the Trust committed to him, and to make a Prey of the Widow and the Orphan, unhappily placed under his Protection. Hence it is that the ambitious Man lays all waste about him, and fills the World with Blood, Violence, and Rapine; sacrificing his Country, Friends, and Relations to his inordinate Desire of Power. Hence it is, that the lustful Man breaks the Bonds of Friendship and Hospitality, and entails Dishonour and Reproach upon the Man who loves him best; hence it is that he lies in wait to betray unguarded Innocence, and is content, for the Sake of his Passion, to bring Shame, Reproach, Remorse of Conscience, and all the Evils of Life, upon a Fellow-Creature. It is the Essence of Morality to bound the Desires within the Limits of Reason, Justice, and Equity. It is not having or exercising great Power that makes an ambitious Man; a King may be as virtuous as any of his Subjects;

Subjects; but it is getting and using it unjustly. It is not much Wealth that denominates a Man covetous, but it is the Method of obtaining and dispensing Riches that makes the Difference. And for the other Case mentioned, you shall have the Resolution of it in the Words of an Apostle, *Marriage is honourable in all Men, and the Bed undefiled; but Whoremongers and Adulterers God will judge.*

It is plain from these Instances, that the Virtue of a Man consists in bounding his Desires, and restraining them within the Limits prescribed by Reason and Morality: These Limits the Lusts of the Flesh are perpetually transgressing; every such Transgression is a Wound to the Soul, which weakens its natural Faculties, and renders it less able to discharge its proper Office: For Reason will not always strive with a Man; but if often subdued by corrupt Affections, it will at last give over the Contest, and grow hard, stupid, and void of Feeling.

And this suggests another Consideration, to shew how effectually sensual Lusts do war against the Soul, by extinguishing the Force of natural Conscience, and not leaving a Man Reason and Religion enough to repent of his Iniquities. The Mind grows sensual by Degrees, and loses all Relish for serious Thought and Contemplation; it contracts an Hardness by long Acquaintance with Sin, and is armed with a brutal Courage which regards neither God nor Man. Age and Infirmities may free us from our sensual Passions, the Sinner may outlive his Sins, but what is he the better, since his Sins perhaps outlived his Conscience, and left him without either Will or Power to turn to God? This is no uncommon Case: And whenever it is the Case, the Circumstances which surround a Man conspire to make it desperate. His Mind, by being long immersed in Sen-

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suality,

suality, is unapt for serious Reflection, and indisposed to receive the Truths which Reason offers: And besides this, the little glimmering Lights of Religion, which shine but faintly in his Mind, yield no Comfort or Consolation to him, and he dreads the breaking in of more Light upon him, lest, by knowing more, he should become more miserable: This makes him love the Darkness in which he is, which helps to screen him from a Sense of his own Misery. And thus the sensual Man spends the poor Remains of Life with very little Sense, and yet much Fear of Religion. And yet were this the worst, happy were his Case, in comparison to what it really is: For sensual Lusts war against the Soul, against the very Being itself, and will render it for ever unhappy and miserable.

The sensual Man has but one Hope with respect to Futurity, and a sad one it is, That he may die like the Beasts that perish: But Nature, Reason, Religion, deny him even this Comfort, and with one Voice proclaim to us, *That God has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World.* When that Day comes, and he shall stand before the Throne of God with all his Sins about him, and every injured Person ready to accuse and demand Justice against him, it is much easier to imagine what his Distress and Misery will be, than for any Words to describe it. Be the Consequence of that Day what it will, it must be fatal to Sinners. Should the much talked-of, and the more wished-for Annihilation be their Doom, it is a Sentence that destroys both Body and Soul; a Sentence shocking to Nature, and terrible to all our Apprehensions; and to which nothing but a guilty Conscience, and a fearful Expectation of something worse, could possibly reconcile the Sentiments of a Man. But neither will this be the Case: There is
a Fire

a Fire that shall never go out prepared for the Spirits of the Wicked, a Worm that never dies ready to torment them. It may be asked perhaps, Do you mean a material Fire, and a material Worm? In good Truth I am little concerned to answer this Question: There is One who will answer it, even He who said it. There is nothing I think so weak as the Disputes about future Punishments. Do you imagine that God wants Means of punishing Sinners effectually? or do you think that when he comes to punish Sin, you shall have a saving Bargain, and that your present Enjoyments will be worth all you can suffer for them hereafter? If you imagine this, you must think God a very weak Being: But if you think him a wise Governor, rest satisfied that there is nothing to be got by offending him; and that it is a foolish Encouragement you give yourself, in imagining that the Pains of Hell will be less tormenting than they are represented to be, when you may be sure from the Power and Wisdom of God, that the Pleasures of Sin will be too dearly purchased at the Price of them.

But to return to the Argument before us: Let us look back, and take a short View of the sensual Man's Condition. In this World his Passions find so much Employment for his Reason, that he is excluded from the Improvements peculiar to a rational Being, and which might recommend him to the Favour of his Maker: With Respect to his Fellow-Creatures he is void of Morality; with Respect to God he is void of Religion: He has a Body worn out by Sin, and a Mind hardened by it: In his Youth he strives to forget God, in his old Age he cannot remember him: He dies fuller of Sins than of Years, and goes down with Heaviness to the Grave, and his Iniquities follow him, and will rise with him again when God calls him to appear and answer for himself:

Then

Then will his Lusts and Appetites, and all the Sins which attended on them, rise up in Judgment against him, and sink his Soul into everlasting Misery. The Sum then of his Account is this: The sensual Man has his Portion of Enjoyment in this World with the Brutes, and in the next his Punishment with wicked Spirits. This is the War which the Lusts of the Flesh wage against the Soul: From such Enemies a wise Man ought to fly, for they have Power not only to destroy the Body, but to cast both Body and Soul into Hell.





DISCOURSE X.



MATTHEW xxvii. 38.

Then were there two Thieves crucified with him; one on the right Hand, and another on the left.

W H A T different Effects the Judgments of God have upon the Minds of Men, may be learned from these Examples now before us. Here are two Thieves crucified with our blessed Saviour; two, who were probably guilty of the same Crimes, and now under the same Condemnation; both brought by the Providence of God to suffer in the Company of his own Son, whose Blood was shed for the Sins of the whole World. But mark the End of these Men: One died reproaching and blaspheming Christ, and breathed out his Soul in the Agonies of Guilt and Despair; the other saw, acknowledged, and openly confessed his Redeemer, and expired with the Sound of those blessed Words in his Ears, *To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

How

How adorable is the Wisdom of God, who has thus instructed us; and, by setting the Examples of his Justice and Mercy so near together, has taught us to fear without Despair, and to hope without Presumption! Who would not tremble for himself, when he sees the Man perish in his Sins who died by his Saviour's Side; within reach of that Blood which was poured out for his Redemption, but wanting Faith to stretch out his Hand, and be saved?

What would the dying Sinner give to have his Saviour so near him in his last Moments, that he might pour out his Soul before him, and seize by Violence the Hand which alone is able to save? Yet he who had all these Advantages enjoyed none of them; but died in his Sins, void of Hope and of Comfort.

Must the Sinner then despair, and has God forgot to be merciful? No. Cast your Eyes on the other Side of the Cross, and there you may see the Mercy of God displayed in the brightest Colours. There hangs the Penitent, surrounded with all the Terrors of approaching Death; yet in the midst of all calm and serene, confessing his Sins, glorifying the Justice of God in his own Punishment, rebuking the Blasphemy of his Companion, justifying the Innocence of his Saviour, and adoring him even in the lowest State of Misery; and at last receiving the certain Promise of a blessed Immortality.

Thus the Case stands with all the Allowances made to it which seem most to favour a Death-bed Repentance: And yet, as if the Scripture had said nothing of the Wretch who died blaspheming and reproaching Christ, nor given us any Cause to fear that a wicked Life may end in an hardened and obdurate Death; the Case of the Penitent only is drawn into Example,

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Example, and such Hopes are built on it, as are neither consistent with the Laws of God, nor the Terms of Man's Salvation; for even of this Example the most preposterous and absurd Use is made. This Penitent, as soon as he came to the Knowledge of Christ, repented of his Sins: If you are fond of the Example, *Go and do likewise*: If you delay, and pursue the Pleasures of Sin, upon the Encouragement which this Instance affords you, it is plain, that you like nothing in the Repentance, but only the Lateness of it; and that your Inclinations are to imitate the Thief, rather than the penitent Christian. Once he lived by Violence, in defiance of the Laws of God and Man: When he was penitent, he abhorred and detested his Iniquities: Which Part would you imitate? If both, if like him you propose to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin, and like him to repent and enjoy the Pleasures of Heaven, you mightily impose on yourself; his Case can never be yours, and therefore his Example cannot be your Security. Besides, were the Case indeed parallel to that of the dying Christian, yet still it can afford no certain Hope; since the Proof is as strong from the Case of the impenitent Thief, that you shall die in your Sins; as it can be from the other Case, that you shall repent of them.

It would take up too much of your Time to consider this Case distinctly in all its Views: I shall therefore only briefly hint to you the Circumstances which distinguish it from that of the dying Christian; and then proceed to shew, what little Hope this Example affords, allowing the Case to be what it is generally supposed to be.

First then; In all this perhaps there may be nothing resembling a Death-bed Repentance. It is no uncommon

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mon thing for Malefactors to lie in Prison a long time, before they are brought to Trial and Execution; and if that is the present Case, there is room enough for the Conversion of this Criminal before he came to suffer. The Circumstances incline this Way. How came he to be so well acquainted with the Innocence of Christ, if he never heard of him till he met him on the Cross? How came it into his Head to address to him in the Manner he does, *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom?* What were the Marks of Royalty that were to be discovered on the Cross? What the Signs of Dignity and Power? What could lead him to think that his Fellow-sufferer had a Title to any Kingdom? what to imagine, that he was Lord of the World that is to come? These Circumstances make it probable that he had elsewhere learned the Character and Dignity of Christ, and came persuaded of the Truth of his Mission: And what is this to them, who have no Desire to lie down Christians upon their Death-bed, though they would willingly go off Penitents?

Secondly, Suppose this great Work were begun and finished on the Cross; yet it cannot be drawn into Example by Christian Sinners: Because the Conversion of a Jew or an Heathen is one Thing, and the Repentance of a Christian is another. The Promises of God, through Christ, are so far certain, that whenever an Unbeliever repents and is converted, his Sins shall be forgiven. This was the Penitent's Case; and therefore the Pardon granted to him answers directly to Baptismal Regeneration; and has nothing to do with a Death-bed Repentance; nor can at all affect them who have fallen from Grace once received. For,

Thirdly,

Thirdly, The profligate Life of this unconverted Sinner was not attended with such aggravating Circumstances as the Sins of Christians are. He sinned against the Light of Nature, and the common Rules of Reason and Morality : But it might at least be said for him, that he was the unhappy Son of an unhappy Father, conceived in the degenerate and corrupted State of Nature ; that he wanted both the Sense and Knowledge, the Hopes and Fears, and the Helps and Assistances, which the Gospel affords for destroying the Power and Dominion of Sin : And the greater his Weakness was, the fitter Object of Mercy was he ; and because he had not been freed by Grace from the Power of Sin, he had the better Plea to be freed by Mercy from Punishment. But are there the same Excuses, or the same Hopes of Pardon for Christians, who sin against Knowledge, against the powerful Motives of Hope and Fear, and in despite of the Holy Spirit, with which they were sealed ? To sin in Hopes of Pardon, and upon the Prospect of future Repentance, is itself a great Aggravation of Sin, and a sad Abuse of the Mercy of God.

If the Heathen sins, he sins under those Infirmities of Nature for which Christ died ; but the Christian sins under the Use of all the Remedies which the Gospel has provided, and which were purchased for him by his dying Saviour. The Condition of Mankind after the Fall afforded, without doubt, many Arguments of Pity and Compassion ; and such Arguments as moved the Son of God to undertake their Redemption. The ignorant, the unenlightened Sinner has Right to plead all these Arguments in his own Behalf : His is the common Cause of Mankind ; and Nature, with unutterable Groans, cries for him and all her Children before her great Creator.

If

If the Penitent received the first Knowledge of Christ upon the Cross, yet how much more had he to say for himself, than the Christian, who comes to make his Peace at the Hour of Death? He might thus plead his unhappy Cause: "Lord, I am one of those
 "Sinners, for whom thy Son now expires upon the
 "Cross; I was conceived in Sin, and brought forth
 "in Iniquity; I have wandered in Ignorance and
 "Darkness, without the Light of thy Gospel to direct me, without the Help of thy Spirit to protect
 "me: Why was all my Life so dark, and these few
 "last Minutes only blessed with the Knowledge of thy
 "Son? Lord, accept the poor Remains of Life,
 "since it is all I have left to offer: My latest
 "Breath shall confess my own Guilt, and my Saviour's Innocence: And since thy Wisdom has united
 "me to him in this Cross, let me never more part
 "from him; but as I am joined with him in his Death,
 "so let me be likewise in his Life for evermore."

But what shall the dying Christian say, after an hardened Life of Sin and Impenitence? What Words shall we put in his Mouth to appease the Anger of his injured Redeemer? You may spend your Time in lamenting your past Folly; but with what Language will you approach to God? You have neither Ignorance nor Weakness to plead: you were enlightened with his Word; and his Holy Spirit was ever ready to assist you, had you been ready to endeavour after Holiness. What will you then say, when frightened and amazed you call for Mercy at your last Moments? May not the Lord then say, "How long have I waited in
 "vain for these Prayers, and these Sighs? how have I
 "spoken to you by your Conscience within, and by
 "the Ministry of my Word from without; and how
 "have my Calls been despised? The Gates of Mercy
 "were

"were always open to you, but you shut them against
 "yourself: But though you could fly from the Mercy
 "of God, yet his Justice will overtake you." Con-
 sider but this calmly with yourselves, and you will
 find that the wicked Christian's Case is so much worse
 than the Penitent's upon the Cross, that there can be
 no Reason for you to encourage yourselves upon this
 Example; or to hope for the same Mercy, when your
 Case will be greatly different. These are such Cir-
 cumstances as enter into the Nature of the Case, and
 will make it always unfit, and oftentimes impossible,
 to be imitated by a Christian. But there are other
 Circumstances fit to be observed, which render a
 Death-bed Repentance very insecure and dangerous,
 though we should allow it all the Hopes which have
 been raised from the Case before us.

As, first; He that sins in hopes of repenting at
 last, may sin so far, as to grow hardened and obdurate,
 and incapable of Repentance when the Time comes;
 This Reflection is grounded upon the Case of the
 impenitent Thief; who was crucified with our Saviour;
 who, though he had certainly all the outward Ad-
 vantages which the Penitent had, yet he made no
 Step towards Repentance, but died reproaching Christ,
 and joining with those who crucified him, in that
 bitter Jeer, *If thou be the Christ, come down from the
 Cross.* Or, if you want more Evidence, this Example
 may be backed by many more in our own Time;
 it being no uncommon Thing to see Malefactors die
 stupid and senseless, and go out of the World as
 wickedly as they have lived in it: And what can
 this be attributed to, but to the Desertion of God's
 Holy Spirit, which will not always strive with Sin-
 ners, but sometimes leaves them to perish in the
 Hardness of their Hearts? So that the Man who sins
 in

in hopes of repenting, can never be sure of this last Retreat; because by pursuing the first Part of his Design, that is, to enjoy the Pleasure of Sin, he may soon grow incapable of the last, which is repenting. I question not but that those who reserve themselves to these last Hopes of repenting, mean sincerely to do it when the Time comes; for hardly can I think that any Man means to suffer for his Sins: But then those who enter upon Sin with these tender Regards to their own Souls, soon grow above such mean Thoughts, and would scorn to own themselves in the Number of those who are Candidates for Repentance: They contract a Familiarity with Sin, and, with *Solomon's* Fools, learn to *make a Mock of it*, till by Degrees their Consciences are hardened, and not to be touched by those soft Impressions which at the first setting out they felt from the languishing Remains of Grace. And from hence it comes to pass, that when these Sinners lie down upon a sick Bed, they often want both the Will and the Power to ask Forgiveness; and, by an habitual Neglect of all Parts of Religion, become unable to perform any, even that in which all their poor Hopes are concluded, to repent of, and ask pardon for, their Sins. Nor is it in your own Power to sin to what Degree you please, or to preserve a Sense of Religion, amidst the Pleasures of Iniquity: If it were, possibly the Danger in this Respect might be less: But Habits grow insensibly; there is a kind of Mechanism in it, as in the Growth of the Body, and he that gives himself up to Sin can no more resolve how great a Sinner he will be, than he that is born a Man can resolve how tall, or how short, of Stature he will be. To the Truth of this Experience daily witnesses: Happy are those who want this fatal Experience! With how much Pain and Uneasiness do Men
bring

bring themselves to do the Things which in a little Time they glory and take pride in, or at least grow easy and contented under? And thus the Man, who with great Tremblings of Heart, and Misgivings of Mind, brings himself to taste the Pleasures of Sin, with Resolutions of an after Repentance, comes at last to be so well reconciled to his Sins, as not to think Repentance necessary for them. The Moment you give yourself up to Sin, you give yourself out of your own Power; you lay the Chains upon the Neck of Reason, and set the Passions free: Conscience, which used to be your Advance-Guard, and give you early Notice of every approaching Evil, falls into the Power of Lust and Affection: And when Reason and Conscience are destroyed, the triple Cord is broken, and Religion must soon follow after; and how, in this general Rout, one poor Resolution, to repent of all this Iniquity, should escape, is more than can be easily conceived: and yet when you lose that, you lose yourself; it is your last, your only Hope. Upon the whole, there is much more Reason to fear, that Sin, if once you indulge it, should get the better of, and destroy, your Resolution of Repentance, than that your Resolution to repent should ever conquer and destroy the confirmed Powers and Habits of Sin. And I wish those who have not yet put it out of their own Power to reason calmly upon these Things, would enter into this Debate with their own Hearts, and consider what Danger they are in: A few Moments cannot be too much to spend in so weighty an Affair: and whenever you retire to these cool Thoughts, may the Father of Mercies influence those Moments of your Life, upon which all Eternity depends!

But, secondly, could you preserve your Resolutions of Repentance, yet still it is not in your own Power

Power to secure an Opportunity to execute them. The Thief upon the Cross died a violent Death, by the Hand of Justice; happy in this at least, that he knew how long he had to live; and had no Ground to flatter himself with the Hopes of many Years to come. He had no Pretence to defer his Repentance, in Prospect of a farther Opportunity; nor was his Heart to be allured by the soft and entertaining Pleasures of Life; when Life itself was so near expiring. From the like Death God defend us all! and yet, without it, which of us can hope for such favourable Circumstances for Repentance? Whenever the Sinner thinks of Repentance, he will find that he has a Work of great Sorrow and Trouble upon his Hands; and this will make him unwilling to set about it. No Man is so old but that he thinks he may last out one Year more: And then, why will not To-morrow serve for Repentance as well as To-day? And thus the great Work is delayed, till Sickness or natural Infirmities render him incapable of it. It was the Sight of this strange Delusion in which Men live, still promising themselves longer Life, and upon those Hopes deferring the necessary Work of Eternity, which made the Holy Psalmist break forth into that moving Petition: *So teach us to number our Days, that we may apply our Hearts unto Wisdom.* The Way that Men generally number their Days, can produce nothing but Folly and Wickedness: The many Years to come, which they rejoice in, serve only to make them careless and negligent, and thoughtless of the great Concerns of Immortality: And whether Men are not deluded by these Hopes, let any one judge. Do but suppose that you were in the Thief's Case, and certainly to die upon a fixed Day: Do you not think that you should have other Thoughts, other Concerns about you? Could you then delay your Repentance, and

say, To-morrow will be Time enough? If you would not do it then, why will you do it now? Only for this Reason, that you think you have Time enough in Reserve to do this Work hereafter. And so you may continue to think with as much Reason, as you do now, till Death, or the Sickness which leads to it, surprises you. And hence it comes to pass that very few, who sin with Resolutions of Repentance, ever think of it till they are confined to a sick Bed; because, as long as they are in Health, they have always this Answer ready, It will be Time enough hereafter. So that the unfortunate End, to which Justice brought this Penitent upon the Cross, was, with respect to his Conversion, an Advantage that few Christians will give themselves: The Certainty of his Death made his Repentance certain, permitted him no Delays, no vain Excuses, no flattering Hopes of better Opportunities hereafter.

Thirdly, Considering that Christians, who propose to themselves this Example of the Thief upon the Cross, seldom repent till they are warned by Sickness to prepare for Death; they will evidently want another Advantage, which this Penitent had. His Death not being the Effect of any bodily Pain, or Distemper, but of the Judge's Sentence, he brought with him to the Cross, which, if you please, you may call his Death-bed, a sound Body and Mind. He had his Senses perfect, his Reason fresh and undisturbed; and was capable of performing such Acts of Faith and Devotion, as were necessary to his Repentance and Conversion. But how different often is the Case of the sick and languishing Sinner? Perhaps he labours under such acute Pains, as will give him no Respite for Thought or Reflection; or perhaps he dozes, and lies stupid, without knowing his Friends and Relations, or even himself; or perhaps

the Distemper seizes his Head, and he raves and is distracted; loses his Sense and Reason, and every thing of the Man, but the outward Shape, before his Death. And are not these hopeful Circumstances for Repentance? Is a Man likely to know and find out his Saviour, when he knows not even his own Brother who stands by his Bed-side? These are very common Circumstances, and such as render Repentance impracticable. But should the Sinner escape all these Accidents, and go off gently without being forsaken by his Sense or Reason; yet still it may happen, and often it does, that his promised Repentance produces nothing but Horror and Despair. In his Life-time he flattered himself with unreasonable Hopes of Mercy, and now he begins to see how unreasonable they were: Now he can think of nothing, but that he is going to appear before his Judge, to receive the just Rewards of Wickedness: He sees him already clothed with Wrath and Majesty; and forms within his own tormented Breast the whole Process of the last Day. If he sleeps, he dreams of Judgment and Misery; and when he wakes, believes his Dreams forebode his Fate. Thus restless and uneasy, thus void of Comfort and Hope, without Confidence to ask Pardon, without Faith to receive it, does the wretched Sinner expire, and has the Misfortune to see his Hopes die before him. In a Word then, put all the favourable Circumstances together that you can imagine; bring the Sinner by the gentlest Decays of Nature to his latter End; give him the fairest and the longest Warning; yet still you give him no Security: If he is not sensible of his Sin and Impenitence, he will die, like the wicked Thief upon the Cross, reproaching Christ, hardened and obdurate against the Thoughts of Judgment: Or, if he comes to a Sense, and sees his own Unworthiness,

how

how shall he be preserved from Despair, and such a Dread of his righteous Judge, as will make him neither fit to live, nor fit to die? Nothing but an extraordinary Degree of Grace can preserve him in a Temper fit for Repentance, free on one Side from Confidence and Presumption, on the other from slavish Fear which casts out Love, which may produce Sorrow, but not Repentance. And whether those who have lived under the continual Calls of Grace to Virtue and Holiness, who have rejected the Counsel of God whilst they had Health and Strength to serve, shall be thought worthy of such extraordinary Mercy at last, let any reasonable Man judge. It cannot be supposed that God intends to save Christians in this Way; which would be at once to evacuate all the Rules and Duties of the Gospel. Christ came to destroy Sin and the Works of the Devil; but were Men promised Forgiveness upon the Account of a few Sighs and Tears at last, this would effectually establish and confirm the Kingdom of Satan. Though God has promised Pardon to penitent Sinners, yet his Promise must be expounded so as to be consistent with his Design in sending Christ into the World; and then it can never be extended to those, who use the Gospel as a Protection to Wickedness, and sin because God has promised to be merciful. In a Word, you have the Promises of the Gospel set before you, you have the Mercies of God in Christ offered to you; if you will accept them, and do your Part, happy are you: But if you are for finding out new Ways to Salvation, if you seek to reconcile the Pleasures and Profits of Sin with the Hopes of the Gospel, you do but deceive yourselves; for *God is not mocked*, nor will he regard those who make such perverse Use of his Mercy.

What then remains, but that all who love their own Souls seek the Lord whilst happily he may be found; and work for their Salvation whilst they have the Light; *for the Night cometh, when no Man can work.* The Night cometh on apace, and brings with it a Change which every Mortal must undergo. Then shall we be forsaken of all our Pleasures and Enjoyments, and deserted by those gay Thoughts which now support our foolish Hearts against the Fears of Religion. The Time cometh, and who, O Lord, may abide its Coming! when we must stand before the Judgment-Seat of Christ; when the Highest and the Lowest shall be placed on the same Level, expecting a new Distribution of Honours and Rewards. In that Day the stoutest Heart will tremble, and the Countenance of the proudest Man will fall in the Presence of his injured Lord. I speak not to you the Suggestion of Superstition or Fear, but the Words of Soberness and of Truth. May they sink into your Hearts, and yield you the Fruits of spiritual Joy and Comfort here, and of Glory and Immortality hereafter!





DISCOURSE XI.

PART I.

PSALM lxxvii. 9, 10.

*Hath God forgotten to be gracious, hath he in Anger
shut up his tender Mercies?*

*And I said, This is my Infirmary; but I will remem-
ber the Years of the Right Hand of the Most
High.*

HOEVER was the Author of this Psalm,
W he was manifestly under a great Dejection
of Mind when he penned it: He speaks of
himself as detested of God, and given up
to be a Prey to the Sorrows of his own disturbed tor-
mented Heart. *His Soul refused Comfort*, as he com-
plains in the second Verse: *When he remembered God,*
he was troubled; when he complained, his Spirit was
overwhelmed, as he laments in the third Verse.

What the particular Grief was, which gave rise to this mournful Complaint, does not appear; but whatever it was, the Sting of it lay in this, That the Psalmist apprehended himself to be forsaken of God: And without Doubt this is of all Afflictions the most afflicting, the most insupportable; a Grief it is, which no Medicine can reach, which all the Powers of Reason can hardly assist, for *the Soul refuses to be comforted.*

These Fears, these Sorrows, belong not to the Vicious and Profligate, who *have not God in all their Thoughts*: They live without Reflection, and therefore without Concern; and can be extremely diverted with hearing or seeing what modest and humble Sinners suffer from a Sense of Religion: But, bold and fearless as such Men are, their Day of Fear is not far off, it draws near apace; and, when it comes, will convince them of the Truth of the wise Preacher's Observation; *The Heart of the Wise is in the House of Mourning, but the Heart of Fools is in the House of Mirth.*

There is a very great Difference between the Misgivings and Misapprehensions of a religious Mind, and the Fear to which Sinners are always exposed, and which oftentimes they experience. The Fears of the Religious are frequently ill-grounded, and arise from their not rightly considering and understanding their own Case, or the Methods of God's Providence in relation to this World: But the Sinner's Fear is never ill-grounded, for if the profligate Sinner has not Reason to fear God, there can be no such Thing as a reasonable Fear in the World. The religious Man may fear in the Hours of his Weakness and Infirmary; the Sinner can only fear when he comes to his right Reason, and a due Sense of his Condition.

This Observation will serve to distinguish between the Fears to which the Religious are subject, and which

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the Text leads us to consider; and the Fears of Guilt, which are foreign to our present Purpose, and to be treated in quite a different Manner.

That the Psalmist speaks of the Sorrows of a religious well-disposed Heart, is manifest from the Description he gives of his Conduct and Behaviour under his Distress: He was sorely troubled, *but in the Day of his Trouble he sought the Lord* (Verse 2.) He was afflicted, but in his Affliction he *remembered God* (Verse 3.) Whatever Doubts he entertained as to his own Condition, and the Favour of God towards him, yet of the Being, the Power, and Wisdom of God he never doubted. This Faith, which in his utmost Extremity he held fast, proved to be his Sheet-Anchor, and saved him from the Shipwreck which the Storms and Tempests raised in his own Breast seemed to threaten.

It is worth our while to observe the Train of Thought which this afflicted good Man pursued, and what were the Reflections in which he rested at last, as his best and only Comfort and Support.

Whether the Calamities which afflicted him were private to himself, or public to his People and Country; yet as long as his Thoughts dwelt on them, and led him into Expostulations with God for the Severity of his Judgments, he found no Ease or Relief. A weak Man cannot rightly judge of the Actions even of a Man wiser than himself, of whose Views and Designs he is not Master; much less can any Man judge of the Ways of God, to whose Councils he is not admitted, and to whose Secrets he is a Stranger. And tho' it is but too natural for Men, when they consider the Sins of others, to complain for want of Justice in the World, and when they consider their own, of want of Mercy; yet in both Cases do they act weakly and inconsistently, pretending to judge where they want not only Authority to

decide, but even Understanding sufficient to try, the Cause. The Psalmist complained heavily, *Has God forgotten to be gracious, hath he in Anger shut up his tender Mercies?* But what did he get by this Complaint? was he not forced immediately to confess the Impropriety and Folly of it? *I said, This is my Infirmity.* He said very rightly: In complaining, he followed the natural Impressions of Passion and Impatience; in acknowledging the Folly of his Complaint, he spoke not only the Language of Grace, but of Sense and Reason.

What must we do then? since it is Weakness to complain, and Folly to judge, of the Methods of God's Providence, what is there left for us to do? and what Part must we take? Must Religion be senseless and stupid, and shut out all Reflection on the Ways of God? No: One Way there is still left open to us, To trust, and to depend on God: And a Way it is so far from being senseless and stupid, that in pursuit of it we shall see opening before us the noblest Views that Reason or Religion can afford.

I am not prescribing to you a Method of my own, it is the very Method the Psalmist prescribed to himself. *God has not left himself without Witness;* the great Works of Nature and of Grace proclaim aloud his loving Kindness to the Children of Men. If we consider them attentively, we must admire his Power and adore his Goodness: And when we see such Power united with so much Goodness towards us, it is but a natural Step to throw ourselves upon his Protection; to trust the Hand that once made us, and has always saved us. When I complain, says the Psalmist, *It is my Infirmity,* but *I will remember the Years of the Right Hand of the Most High. I will remember the Works of the Lord: Surely I will remember thy Wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy Works, and talk of all thy Doings.*

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Here then was his Comfort, here the Cure of all his Grief: The Scene around him was dark and gloomy; but, dark as it was, it was under the Guidance and Direction of the Hand that had never failed the Faithful, to deliver him out of all his Troubles.

The Text, and the Occasion of it, thus explained, lead us to consider these two Propositions:

First, That all Complaints against Providence proceed from Weakness and the Infirmary of human Reason.

Secondly, That a settled Peace of Mind, with respect to God, must arise from a due Contemplation of the great Works of Providence, which God has laid open to our View for our Consideration and Instruction.

The first Proposition is, That all Complaints against Providence proceed from Weakness and the Infirmary of human Reason. Under this Head are included all the Suspicions that are apt to rise in Mens Minds against Providence, as well as the formal Complaints brought against it. And the first of this Sort, which naturally presents itself to the Mind, when we consider God and ourselves, is this, That God is too great and too excellent a Being to humble himself to behold the Things that are on Earth. This one Mistake seems to have been the Whole of *Epicurus's* Divinity. He thought it would be endless for the Gods to attend to every thing that passed on Earth, and to concern themselves with the Conduct and Behaviour of every particular Man in the World: He thought they could not do this without being moved sometimes to Anger and Resentment, and sometimes to the Passion of Joy; which he conceived to be equally inconsistent with an uniform settled State of Happiness. To make therefore his Gods happy, he removed them from all Government

of Men, and left Men to shift as they could, without God or Providence, in the World.

The same Thought has in all Times been the Refuge of Sinners; their Language has ever been, *How doth God know, and is there Knowledge in the Most High?* Perhaps too this Suspicion has entered into better Minds, broken with Grief and Affliction, and tempted by their Misfortunes to think that God regards not the Things below.

But how different soever the Grounds of this Suspicion may be in one Case, and in another, yet in every Case it is manifestly weak and unreasonable.

To imagine that it is too much Trouble, or any Trouble, to God to govern the World, and all the Beings in it, is a mere childish Conceit; it is talking of God, as if God were a Man, and as liable to be fatigued and tired with Multiplicity of Business as a Man is. How do you know that there is any thing tiresome or disagreeable in much Business, and in Variety of Employment? It is true, you find it is so in yourself, and you observe it is so in others: You may therefore very well conclude, that much Business is tiresome to Men like yourself; but by what Reason do you extend this Conclusion to God? unless you think he is in this Respect like you, and that he has no larger Powers and Abilities than you have.

As it is absurd to argue from the Powers of Men to the Powers of God, so it is likewise to argue from the Passions of Men to the Affections of the Deity. Men may be grieved and tormented with seeing Affairs under their Conduct go wrong, may be overjoyed at some unexpected Success; but can this ever be the Case of a Being of infinite Power and infinite Wisdom? Nothing can happen but what he orders or permits, for his Power is over all: Nothing that he orders or permits
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can be wrong; for his Wisdom is equal to his Power. What Disappointments then are there to grieve him? What unexpected Success to transport him? You see now that this Suspicion, which set out with supposing God to be so great and excellent a Being, that the Affairs of Men were below his Care, concludes with making him so like a Man, as not to be able to bear the Fatigue and Vexation of so much Business.

Epicurus and his Followers, who denied God's Government of the World, denied also that he made it. So far at least they were consistent; for if they thought it too much Trouble for God to govern the World, they could not consistently put him to the Trouble of making it. But if we turn the Argument, and begin with considering the Works of the Creation, and, according to the Instruction of the Psalmist, *call to Remembrance those Years of the Right Hand of the Most High*; we shall from these manifest and undeniable Works of God be led to just Conclusions with respect to the Methods of divine Providence, less obvious to our Observation, in the Government of the World. When we shall see the Hand of God employed in forming the lowest; and, in our Eyes, the most contemptible Creatures on Earth; ranging and adjusting all the Parts of the World so, that there is not a Particle of Matter but what has its proper Place in Subserviency to the Whole of the Creation; it will be impossible for a reasonable Man to think that God has no Care of this World, which with so much Care and Wisdom he created; or that it should be below him to preserve those Beings, which he did not think it below him to make. But this Consideration belongs to the second Proposition, and will meet us again in its proper Place. To proceed then:

Another Reason, which some have for suspecting that the Affairs of the World are not under the Conduct of Providence, is, That they cannot discern any certain Marks of God's interposing: On the contrary, they think it evident, that all the inanimate and irrational Parts of the World follow a certain Course of Nature invariably; and that Men act with all the Signs of being given up to follow their own Devices, without being either directed or restrained by a superior Power.

That many Men talk and think in this Way there is no doubt. The Scoffers in St. Peter's Time supported themselves upon this Observation, *That all Things continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation*; concluding, that they would go on so for ever, and there was nothing beyond this present State of Things for which they ought to be concerned.

But in this Way of Reasoning there are two great Mistakes:

1. That the Conclusion is not rightly drawn from the Observation, supposing the Observation to be true.
2. Supposing the Conclusion to be true, it will not answer the Purpose intended.

1. That the material World continues to answer the Purposes for which it was created, is surely, when rightly considered, the strongest Evidence that it was made, and is conducted, by the highest Wisdom and Power. Is it any Praise to a Workman, or any Proof of his Skill and Ability, that the House of his building is running to Ruin? and that it wants reforming and supporting every Year? Surely every Man would chuse, if he could, to have his Habitation secured against the Injuries of Time and Accidents. And can we expect less of an House, whose Builder is God, than that it should continue firm and stable, and without Decay, during the Time intended and limited for its Continuance?

ance? If all Things therefore continue as they were from the Beginning of the Creation; it proves that they were extremely well made at first, and have been extremely well preserved ever since: And can this afford to a Man of any Thought or Reflection an Objection against Providence?

It may be said, perhaps, That it is not merely the continuing of the World that is the Objection, but its continuing always in one unwearied Course. The Sun rises and sets now, just as it did three or four thousand Years ago: And what Sign is there of Wisdom or Contrivance in doing the same Thing over and over again for Ages together? This Observation can arise only from what we see among Men; and, with respect to Men, there is Foundation for it: But it is great Weakness, and Want of Thought, to transfer this Observation to the Works of God. Men are improving daily in Knowledge and Experience, and may have good Reason to alter this Year what they did the last, the better to suit their Pleasure or Convenience: But can any Man be so weak as to think this to be the Case of the Almighty? Do you imagine God was young and unexperienced when he made the World, and that he sees Faults in it now which he did not see then? If you do not think this, what Reason can you give why the World should not go on now, as it did from the Beginning? If God made it in the best Manner at first, and without Doubt he did, can there be any just Cause for Alteration?

But farther; Supposing the Observation true, that the World is now where it was at the Beginning; yet no Conclusion can be drawn from thence as to the future Continuance of the World. For though this System of Things shall keep its appointed Course, during the Time determin'd by God for its Continuance; yet
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neither can the present nor the past State of Things enable us in the least Degree to judge when the End will be. And whoever reasons in this Way, may just as well say, Such a Man lived in good Health the last twenty Years, and therefore he shall live in good Health for twenty more. The Argument concludes alike in both Cases, however the Absurdity may appear shocking only in one.

But supposing we should allow even the Conclusion to be right, and that the material World may go on without End: What is it to the Purpose? Whatever becomes of the World, you can last but a little Time. Your Condition hereafter will not depend upon the lasting of the Sun or Moon, or be in the least influenced by it. Let them move on for ever; yet if you in the mean time are to be miserable, and to suffer for your Iniquities, what will you be the better for it? If this World should last for ever, may there not be other States for the Reception of good and bad Spirits, when separate from the Body? If there may, how is Religion, or the Belief of God's Government in the rational and moral World, at all concerned in this Speculation? And how weak and how absurd a Thing is it for Men, who know they must die, and may die to-day or to-morrow, to harden their Hearts against the Belief of Providence, by speculating upon the Durableness of Things without themselves; when their only true Concern is, and ought to be, to know what will become of themselves, being very sure that they cannot continue long here? Our Saviour has told us, that in his *Father's House* are many *Mansions*: This Mansion in which we now live may continue, and yet we may be transferred to other Mansions to be happy or miserable, according as we have behaved ourselves in this.

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Let us consider now, whether the other Part of the Objection, pointed against God's moral Government of the World, has any better Foundation in Reason to support it.

The great Irregularity observable in human Actions, and the Mischiefs and Iniquities which abound in the World, have tempted some to think that God concerns not himself with the Actions of Men, but has given them up entirely to follow their own Devices.

It is truly and justly observed, that there is this Difference between the material and rational Parts of the World; that the material World, and the several Parts of it, act regularly and uniformly, pursuing constantly the Ends and Appointments of Nature; whilst moral Agents act variously, and often inconsistently with the great Ends to which they are ordained. But I wonder any Man, capable of making this Observation, should not at the same time see the true Reason of it, supposing both Parts to be under God's Government.

Matter, being capable of no Action of itself, must necessarily follow the Impressions it receives: Supposing God to govern the World, the material Parts of it must follow the immediate Impressions of his Hand; and where God is the Mover, can you expect any Thing less than Order and Regularity, and a constant Subserviency to the great Ends of the Creation? To suppose therefore the material World to move irregularly and inconsistently with the End to be served, would be supposing God to act irregularly and inconsistently with the End of his own Creation.

But in the moral World the Case is otherwise: Men have a Power of acting and chusing for themselves; and, were it otherwise, they could not be rational

rational or moral Agents. Were God, therefore, to determine the Actions of Men as absolutely and uncontrollably as he directs the Motions of the material World, Men would be, to all Intents and Purposes, as much Parts of the material World as the Trees and Plants which grow in it. And such a Method of Government would destroy and overthrow the very End for which rational Agents were created: For, to what Purpose was Reason and Understanding given to Men, but to guide and direct them, and to make them capable of discharging the Duties of Religion and Morality? But if the Powers of Reason and Understanding were to be perpetually over-ruled, to prevent the Irregularities and Mischiefs which proceed from the free Use of them; what would it be but making Men rational and moral Agents by the Law of their Creation, and then putting them under a Government which leaves no room for Reason or Morality? Which is such a Part as no wise Man would act, and which no reasonable Man would ascribe to God.

Indeed, this very Difference observable in the conducting the material and the moral World, is the strongest Presumption that the Whole is under the Direction of the All-wise Being. Upon Supposition that God governs the World, would you not expect to see all Things directed in a Way suitable to their Nature, and the End for which they were made? Material Beings require to be absolutely and uncontrollably directed; for they have no Power to direct themselves; consequently their Motions must be just and regular, or otherwise, according to the Wisdom and Ability of the Director: And if God be that Director, they must ever be just and regular.

Moral

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Moral Agents cannot be so directed; for it is essential to the Nature of a moral Being to act and chuse for itself: And the Actions of such Beings will be wise and regular, in Proportion to the Wisdom of such Beings; where they are weak and infirm, they will oftentimes be very irregular and blame-worthy. That Men are weak and infirm wants no Proof; consequently, there must be great Signs of Weakness and Imperfection in their moral Behaviour.

Since then it is evident, *a priori*, that the Government of the World, supposing it to be under the Government of God, must be, what it now appears to be; it can be only Want of Thought and Reflection which furnishes Objections, from the present State of Things, against a Divine Providence.

But farther; Though it is necessary to leave Men, considered as moral Agents, to chuse and act freely; yet this is far from excluding the Providence of God from interposing in human Affairs: The Reason is, because this may be done many Ways consistently with the Freedom of Men; and wicked Men may be punished, and good Men rewarded, even in this World, without over-ruling the Wills or Actions of either. A little Reflection will clear this up to every Man's Mind; and therefore I shall say no more than is necessary to explain my Meaning.

The Power of Life and Death, which is in the Hand of God, is alone sufficient for conducting the great Affairs of the World. It is natural for Men to die; and when they do die, no body is surprized at so common an Event; and yet it is evident, that the Well-being of whole Nations often depends upon the Life or Death of a few Men: Let them live, or let them die, no body's Liberty or Freedom of Action is affected

affected by it; yet the Peace and Security of whole Countries, or the utter Ruin and Destruction of them, may depend entirely on the Event.

With respect to private Men, and their Happiness or Misery here; if we consider how much every Man's good or ill Fortune in the World depends upon Variety of Accidents, which may happen one Way or other, but must happen as God shall think proper; it will be easy to conceive, that Men may be effectually punished for their Iniquities, or rewarded for their Virtue, by a Train of Things appearing to be natural and common, without the visible Interposition of Providence.

These secret Methods do not indeed justify the Righteousness of God in the Eyes of Men; nor is it pretended that they are made use of for an exact Administration of Justice in every Case; but it is sufficient if they are or may be used to all the necessary Purposes of Government over moral Beings in a State of Probation; which is a very different Thing from the final Administration of Justice. And whatever Inequalities may appear to us in the Distribution of Good or Evil in this Life, they cannot stand as Objections to God's Government over the World, unless you can prove that there will be no Day of Reckoning hereafter: For, supposing a future State, it is quite consistent with Divine Justice to permit Things to be as we see they are now; since Justice does not sleep, but waits with Patience to see the full Proof of the Righteousness or Unrighteousness of Men.

When the appointed Time shall come for dissolving this Frame of Things, the material World will have done its Office, and may lie by, till called out by the Creator to serve other Uses: But for the moral World there

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is another Scene prepared, in which they must account for their Conduct and Behaviour in this; and answer for the Use they made of those great and excellent Gifts of Reason and Understanding, with which God endowed them.

Lay all these Things together, and consider in one View the whole Scheme of Divine Providence: Then try over again the Misgivings of Mind, and the Suspicions you have entertained against God's Government of the World, and you will perhaps see Reason to confess your own Weakness, and say with the Psalmist, *It is mine own Infirmary.*



1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be answered. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

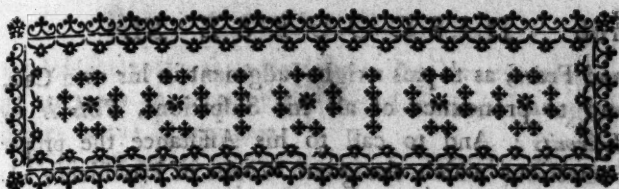
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DISCOURSE XI.



PART II.



THE Suspicions which incline Men to doubt whether God does at all concern himself in human Affairs, have been considered: I shall proceed now to consider the Suspicions which, consistently with admitting a general Care of Providence over the World, lead Men to fear, That they themselves are either neglected or unkindly treated by God. This seems to have been the Psalmist's own Case, and these the Fears which possessed his Mind. Of God's Government of the World he entertained no Doubt; he applied to him in his Trouble and Distress; but his Grief was, that he found no Return to his Prayers; his Sorrows continued and encreased: *When he remembered God, he was troubled; when he complained, his Spirit was over-whelmed.*

But this good Man, being well grounded in Religion, was able so far to get the better of his Doubts

and Fears, as to pass a right Judgment in his own Case, and to pronounce of all his Suspicions, *This is my Infirmary*: And to call to his Assistance the proper Reflections which the great Works of Providence administered for the Support and Confirmation of his Hope and Confidence towards God, *I will remember the Years of the Right Hand of the Most High.*

Now it being admitted that God is not regardless of the World, but that his Providence is watchful for the Preservation of the Whole, It may be doubted whether this Care descends to Particulars, and regards the Actions and the Well-being of Individuals; which, singly considered, make but a small Part of the Whole, and whose Fortunes, be they good or bad, have very little Influence upon the Well-being of the Whole.

If we consider this Suspicion with respect to the material World, a little Reflection will help us to discern that it is entirely groundless, and built upon the weak Conceit, that it will be too troublesome to Providence to attend to the very minute Things of the World. For the minutest Parts of Matter follow the Laws of God and Nature as constantly and as regularly as the great constituent Parts of the World, and work in their proper Sphere as strongly for the Good and Preservation of the Whole. The Warmth and Comfort which you receive from the Fire in your Chamber, is as much owing to the Laws and Constitutions appointed and maintained by God, as the Warmth and Comfort you receive from the Sun: And the Light of a Candle is as truly the Work of God, and as much depending upon his Preservation and Execution of the Laws of Nature, as the Light of the heavenly Bodies. If any Man thinks otherwise, let him try to account for these lesser Phenomena of Nature, and he will find himself under the same Necessity of recurring to the

the Influence of a superior over-ruling Power, as when he attempts to account for the Motions of the great Bodies in the Firmament.

With respect to moral Agents, and God's Government over them, the Case is not quite so plain: And there is a plain Reason why it is not; because moral Agents would not be moral Agents, if they were as regularly moved by an over-ruling Power as material Beings are, and must be; since they can only act as they are acted, which is the Reason why all their Actings are regular and uniform, because the immediate Agent is God.

But with respect to particular Men, and the Care of Providence over them, we may consider that every Man consists of two Parts; one material, which is the Body; another rational, which is the Mind. With respect to the material Part, every single Man manifestly depends upon the Preservation and Care of Providence, as manifestly as the great Bodies of the World depend on the same Care. The Motion of the Heart in a Man no more depends upon his Will, or upon his own Wisdom, than the Motion of the Moon does. The same may be said of all the animal Functions which depend upon involuntary Motions, not under the Influence or Direction of the Will. The Life then of every particular Man, which depends upon these animal Functions, depends upon the Preservation of Providence. And thus far we see, that by the same Way of Reasoning, that we conclude God's Government to extend to the Whole of the Creation, his Care and Government extends to individual Men. This being allowed; Can we possibly suppose that God, who shews so much Care for Men, as they are material animal Beings, should entirely neglect them, considered as moral Agents? This is the very Question

ffion which our Saviour asks in a like Case, *Matt. vi. 26.* Behold, says he, *the Fowls of the Air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns: yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye much better than they?* In like manner we say, Behold yourselves as ye are material Beings; do not all the Motions of the Body, on which Life depends, discover to you the Hand of God supporting and maintaining your Life and Being here? Consider once more; Are you not, as rational Beings, and moral Agents, much more worthy of his Care? And can he, whose Care descends to you as Animals, be supposed to neglect you as moral Agents?

But as strong as this Proof is, by way of Inference and Conclusion, we do not want more direct Proofs of God's Care for Men, as moral Agents. Of this Sort are all the Impressions and Intimations which we receive from Nature, that is, from the Hand of our Creator, for our Government and Direction as moral Agents: The Knowledge of the Difference of Good and Evil, the Power of Conscience, the Passions of Hope and Fear, the Sense of Honour and of Shame, which are natural to all Men, and may be said to be born with them, are so many Proofs of the Care of God for us, considered as moral Agents: And they are not the less so, for being common to all Men; though possibly they have, for that Reason, been less considered in this Light.

Was God to speak directly to every Man, and teach him his Duty, was he visibly to rebuke every Sinner, you would not doubt of his Care for particular moral Agents; but you might doubt, perhaps with good Reason, how consistent such Methods would be with the Freedom which is necessary to the Morality of human Actions. But now, the same Care is taken, the

the same Instructions, the same Admonitions given; with this only Difference, that they are conveyed in a Manner, and a Method, which do not interfere with the Freedom of moral Agents. Consider a little: When you find that you have a natural Notion of the Difference of Good and Evil, and consequently of the great Duties of Morality, who then is your Teacher and Instructor? What you have from Nature, you have from the Author of Nature; and if your Sense of moral Good and Evil be indeed natural, you learnt it from God, and from him only. If the Power of Conscience be natural to a rational Mind, who is it that admonishes you when Conscience flies in your Face? Must it not be He, who placed the Power of Conscience in every rational Mind, to act there as his Deputy, in restraining, rebuking, and correcting every Iniquity? When you are moved by a Sense of Honour to do Things that are virtuous and praiseworthy, and encouraged and supported by Hope of Reward; when you are restrained from Evil by the Sense of Shame, or deterred by the Fear of Punishment; whence have you these great Assistances and Encouragements to Virtue, these Guards and Defences against Vice? If these are natural Passions, and undoubtedly they are, it is God who calls you daily by these his Messengers into the Ways of Honour and Virtue, and warns you to flee from Vice and Iniquity.

These are undeniable Proofs of God's Care for moral Agents; and they reach to every particular Man's Case, who has not extinguished the Powers of Conscience, and the natural Sense of Honour and Shame.

That the Providence of God over particular Men extends still farther, and often interposes to bless and

prosper the Righteous, to punish and confound the Wicked, there can be no Doubt in general, though it is always difficult, and generally presumptuous, to pretend to judge in particular Instances: For the Appearances of Things will not answer to the Observation; the Wicked being sometimes suffered to triumph in this World, and Virtue left to struggle with many Hardships and Distresses: which is the Case of the Psalmist in the Text, complaining that *God had forgotten to be gracious*; and has been, and, in the Reason of the Thing, must be the Case of many righteous Men in every Age.

But this is not the only Difficulty in the Case: For when the Wicked suffer here as they deserve, and the Righteous prosper in their Undertakings; yet the Blessings on one Side, and the Punishments on the other, seem to be conveyed by such natural Means, and so much to be expected from the common Course of Things, that Men seldom think of an immediate Interposition of Providence, and there are hardly Grounds upon which to prove it. But, to balance this Difficulty, let it be considered,

First, That an immediate and visible Interposition of Providence in Behalf of the Righteous, and for the Punishment of the Wicked, would interfere with the Freedom of moral Agents, and not leave room for their Trial: And this is a sufficient Reason for not using this Method.

Secondly, That this Reason excludes only such Methods of rewarding Virtue and punishing Vice here, as are inconsistent with Freedom of Actions; but does by no Means exclude any Methods not liable to this Objection.

Thirdly, That the natural Course of Things being under the Direction of God, it is reasonable to believe

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lieve that they are oftentimes disposed for the Benefit of the Righteous, and for the Punishment of the Wicked; though such Disposition of Things cannot fall under our Observation, every thing appearing to happen according to a natural and ordinary Course.

The first Proposition has been already considered; and the second is but the immediate Consequence of it: Of the third there can remain no Doubt with any Man, who believes that the Providence of God has any Concern at all in the Affairs of the World. That whole Nations may suffer by unseasonable Weather, by Storms and Tempests, by Lightning or by Earthquakes, is manifest in Experience: That all these Things, whenever they happen, are looked upon as natural Events, is allowed: Admitting then, that these Things are under the Government of God, and happen as he thinks fit to direct, the Consequence is manifest, That God can, whenever he pleases, punish wicked Nations, or reward good ones, by a secret Disposition of the Course of Nature, without any such Interposition as is inconsistent with the Method of his Government over rational and moral Beings.

And if this can be done, it is highly reasonable to think it is done; it being in all its Views agreeable to the Goodness and Justice of God, and not inconsistent with the Government of moral Agents. The Truth of this Observation is not confined to the Case of Nations only; it is the same with respect to particular Persons: There are a thousand Accidents in Life (so we call them) upon which the Fortunes of Men depend: As these Things happen one Way or other, a Man is made or undone; and how easy must it be for the Power that presides over all these Accidents, to determine the Fate of Men, and at the same time to escape their Observation? Though it be un-

reasonable, because inconsistent with the Methods of the divine Government over Men, to expect from God, that he should openly appear in the Support of good Men; yet it is rational to expect, from his Providence, *that all Things shall work together* (which is the Language of Scripture) for the Good of those who love him.

And this leads to another, and indeed the great Difficulty of the Case, which relates to the Sufferings of good Men, and the Suspicion they are apt to entertain of God's Kindness towards them, whilst they suffer under the Weight of his afflicting Hand.

The Complaints of this Sort to be met with in Scripture are of two Sorts: One regards the National Calamities of the Jews; the other, the Sufferings of particular Men.

The first made the Subject of the Psalmist's Complaint in the Text; as is probable from the Conclusion of the Psalm, in which he reckons up the great Things formerly done by God for the Deliverance of his People; and concludes with one of the greatest, *Thou leddest thy People like a Flock, by the Hand of Moses and Aaron*. His seeking Comfort, from a Remembrance of God's great Kindnesses to *Israel*, intimates, that his Sorrow was on account of their Sufferings.

But however the Psalmist might be affected by the Calamities of the People, to whom he was so nearly related; yet whoever reads the History of this People in their own Books, will hardly think their Sufferings, as a Nation, stand as an Objection to Providence: They were under the highest Obligations to Obedience, and the most forward to disobey of any other: And it appears, that as often as they repented of their Iniquity, they were saved from such Destructions as seemed to leave no Hope for their Restoration. But the Case of suffering Nations in general, without con-

sidering

sidering the Merit of any particular Nation, is so intricate by a great Variety of Circumstances, that it is hard to form a distinct Judgment. The Iniquity of a Nation is made up of the Iniquities of many; and, it may be presumed, no Nation was ever so bad, but that there were some good People in it: These, be they many or few, are involved in the general Ruin, and their Case makes a distinct Difficulty. Now, though it be scarce possible for us, who can with no Certainty judge of each other, to estimate the Virtue and Vice of Nations, so as to say when they are ripe for Destruction, yet there are some general Observations, which lie within our reach, that will help to justify the Providence of God in this Part of divine Government, and silence Complaints on this Head.

First, There is a natural Tendency in Vice and Immorality to weaken and destroy Nations and Governments; and, that it should be so, is agreeable, in general, to the Notion we have of God's Justice and Goodness.

Secondly, It is also agreeable to our Sense of Justice and Goodness, that Nations, quite degenerate and corrupted, should not be suffered to continue and prosper, and to spread their Vice and Iniquity by means of their Power and Authority.

Thirdly, These Principles allowed, the whole Difficulty lies in the Application of them to particular Cases; which Application to particular Cases depending upon Circumstances which we cannot possibly know, the Objection arises, not from the Reason of the Case, but merely from our Ignorance of it: And where is the Wonder, that there should be many Things in the Administration of divine Government, the Reasons of which we cannot comprehend?

The general Method of Providence, in exalting virtuous and sober Nations, in humbling the proud and profligate, is confessedly agreeable to Justice; and no Man can complain of it. There is no room therefore for any Complaint at all, but when these Rules of Justice are misapplied; and it is not only Weakness, but great Presumption, to say these Rules are in any Case transgressed, because it is a Point in which human Reason cannot judge. Whoever therefore enters into this Complaint, may certainly say with the Psalmist, *It is my Infirmity.*

The Miseries of which good Men have a Share in all public Calamities will fall under the next Head, which relates to the private and particular Sufferings of good Men.

These Complaints must be considered as made by others, in behalf of those who suffer; or, as made by the Sufferers themselves. When others make this Complaint in behalf of the Sufferers, they evidently assume a Fact for which they can have no Proof, That the Sufferers are innocent righteous Persons: And, therefore, it is great Weakness and Infirmity in them to complain against Providence, upon Supposition of a Fact, of which they cannot possibly judge.

The Characters of Men, in the Eye of the World, depend upon their outward Behaviour; and when Men behave so as to deserve a good Character, it is great Want of Candour and Charity to suspect them of Evil: To treat them as deserving ill, would be a direct Violation of common Justice: For since we have no Way of judging Men but by their outward Conduct, to treat those ill who appear to us to deserve well, is acting against the only Rule we have to direct us in the Administration of Justice. But when we judge of God's dealing with Men, and call
him

him to account for his Justice, this Rule, by which we are bound to judge and direct ourselves, is a very unsafe one to follow, and may easily misguide us: The Reason is, because, though we must take Men's Characters from the only Rule we have to go by, their external Behaviour, yet their true and real Character, as to Virtue and Vice, is determinable only by their inward Principles and Sentiments, which are known to God alone, *who searcheth the Heart and Reins*. To judge Men to be wicked, because we see they are miserable, would be acting without Charity towards Men: To judge them to be innocent, and therefore unjustly treated when they suffer, would be acting with great Presumption towards God. From which two Considerations, the Rule of our Duty in these Cases must appear to be this, To treat Men as they appear to us to deserve, whether they are fortunate or unfortunate in the World; and forbear all Censures upon divine Providence, which acts by Rules of the highest Justice, though undiscoverable by us in particular Cases.

But farther, the Man who suffers may be, what you take him to be, a very good Man; and yet his Sufferings no just Occasion for any Complaint on his Behalf. One good Man saw this, and confessed it in his own Case, *It is good for me that I was afflicted: Before I was in Trouble, I went astray*. Even good Men in this Life want sometimes Admonitions to awaken their Care, sometimes Trials to perfect their Faith. And unless you can judge certainly (which most certainly you cannot do) of the End and Purposes of Providence in permitting, a good Man to suffer, you can never, with any Pretence of Reason, pass Judgment upon the Ways of God.

As this is true, with respect to the temporary Sufferings of the Righteous; so is it likewise true, even

when the Righteous are given up to Destruction in this World, and perish, in the Eyes of the World, miserably. Consider the Case of all the Martyrs who have died for the Testimony of God's Truth: Do you esteem them as good Men given up by God, without Mercy, to sundry Kinds of cruel Death? If you do not, it is evident, that good Men may suffer, even to Death, without any just Reflection upon the Goodness of God.

The Truth of the Case is this; Since all Men must die, in the Time and Manner of Death the Difference cannot be great: And how hard soever it may be to reconcile ourselves to Death, to unnatural and violent Death especially; yet, upon the strictest Scrutiny of Reason, it can be no Loss to a good Man, if there be any Truth in Religion, to be removed at any Time out of this World into a better. And this will account for the Case of the Righteous, supposed to suffer in the Destruction of a wicked Nation: They fall indeed like other Men; but they fall into the Hands of God, who knows how to distinguish their Case, and to compensate all their Miseries. I am not recommending these kind of Sufferings to your liking, or trying to reconcile your natural Sentiments to them: This only I contend for, That, upon Principles of Reason and Religion, no Objection can lie against divine Providence on their Account. But to proceed:

When the Sufferer complains in his own Behalf, where is the Man who will venture to put his Complaint into this Form, That a righteous Man is suffering unjustly? We pray daily to God *not to enter into Judgment with us*; and, I think, no Man will care to begin, and enter into Judgment with God: Before he does, he must satisfy himself in these Particulars,

particulars, That he has been guilty of no Offence to deserve the Punishment of Sufferings, That he is so perfect, as not to want the Admonition of them, That he is so approved, as to want no Trial.

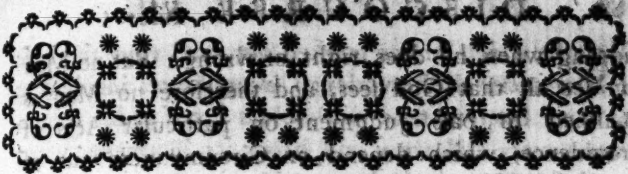
Whoever can come to think of himself in this Manner, will not say of his own Complaint, *It is my Infirmary*; but if the rest of the World say no worse of him, they will deal very tenderly by him.

I have now gone through the general Cases which fall under my Subject: As to the Suspicions about Providence, and the Care of God over us, which have in them a Mixture of religious Melancholy, they are of another Consideration. They are indeed great Infirmities, often they are great bodily Infirmities, and deserve all the Compassion and Assistance that can be given. But these Disorders do not usually break out into Objections against Providence, but rather turn upon the Sufferers themselves, who are apter to judge hardly of themselves than of God; and if they despair of Mercy, it is because they think themselves unworthy of it. They belong not therefore to the present Subject.

To conclude: You see how dangerous it is to sit in Judgment upon God, and to censure the Methods of his Government. In every Government particular Cases have their particular Reasons: Those who know the Reasons and Circumstances of each Case, may know whether the general Rules of Justice and Equity are properly applied in the Judgment and Determination of the Case. Others cannot possibly judge, though, perhaps, in the general Rules of Justice they may be well skilled. If this be true in human Government, it must needs hold more strongly in the Government of God. One Man may see what another Man can see, and therefore may be capable of
I 5 judging.

judging when he does right or wrong : But no Man can see all that God sees, and therefore no Man is qualified to pass Judgment on particular Acts of Providence, which depend on Circumstances out of the Reach of human Eyes. The great Works of God, which are before us, if duly attended to, declare his Wisdom, Goodness and Power; and the Voice of Nature, in all her Works, speaks in the Language of the wise King, *Trust in the Lord with all thine Heart, and lean not to thine own Understanding.* Happy are they who listen to this still Voice ! they will act not only the safest, but the most rational Part ; whilst others, full of themselves and their own Wisdom, are daily condemning what they do not understand : And if ever they recover their right Reason, the first Step must be to see their Weakness, and to join with the Psalmist in his humble Confession, *It is my own Infirmary.*





DISCOURSE XII.



PSALM xciv. 19.

*In the Multitude of my Thoughts within me, thy
Comforts delight my Soul.*

The old Translation renders it thus:

*In the Multitude of the Sorrows that I had in my
Heart, thy Comforts have refreshed my Soul.*

THESE Versions, as they both very well
express the Sense of the Original, so they
give Light to each other. *The Multitude
of Sorrows*, mentioned in one Transla-
tion, must be the Sorrows, in some Sort, peculiar to
the Men of Thought and Reflection; since in the other
they are called, *The Multitude of Thoughts*. That there
are such Sorrows we learn from one who was himself a
Man of great Thought: *In much Wisdom, says the
Preacher, is much Grief; and he that increaseth Know-
ledge increaseth Sorrow.* If we follow the Train of
Thought

Thought which he has marked out, and view the Life of Man under all the various Circumstances incident to it, every Step we take will yield a Proof of his Proposition, every Discovery will bring its Torment, when we find, *That all the Days of Man are Sorrows, and his Travel Grief; yea, his Heart taketh not Rest in the Night.*

But there is no End of such Inquiries; and indeed not much Reason for them: We may sit still, and our own Experience will bring this Knowledge home to us, without giving us the Trouble of looking abroad into the World to find it. Cares and Anxieties will make their Way to us, though our Doors are guarded within and without. We need only have common Understanding to see the Evil that is in the World; and we must want common Sense, if we feel no Share of it ourselves.

The Distemper then is plain: But who is he that can cure it? Who can administer a Remedy sufficient to the Evil, and give Ease to an Heart oppress'd with Sorrows, and weigh'd down with a Multitude of tormenting Thoughts? To find a Cure for the Evils of Life has employ'd the Thoughts of the wisest Men in all Ages; and the Employment was worthy of all their Care. But yet the World is where it was, nothing happier for their Inquiries; still complaining, still calling out for Help, and finding none. Some bid us lay hold of the good Things of the World, and open our Hearts to the Pleasures of Life. Wholesome Advice! but where are the good Things to be purchased, the Use of which they prescribe? What Merchant can furnish us with sincere Pleasures, and Ease of Mind which knows no Grief? Others bid us be above Pain and Sorrow, and call strongly upon our Reason to reject these Phantoms of the Imagination, which can have

no Effect upon a wise Man. An hard Lesson! For, though the Master may forget common Sense whilst he is teaching, yet the Scholar will find it hard to forget it when it comes to feeling. What must we do then? Must we give ourselves up to Despair, and as a Prey to the Calamities of Life? No: One Remedy there still is, unknown to the Wisdom of Greece, unsought for by the Men of this World, capable of administering Pleasure and Delight to our Minds, amidst all the Uncertainties and Vexations that surround us. What this is, you may learn from the Words of the Text, *Thy Comforts have refreshed my Soul.*

The plain Meaning of this is, That Religion, or a just Sense of our Relation to God, is the only real and solid Support against the many Evils of Life: This is our Sheet-Anchor; with this, no State of Life is insupportable; without it, no Condition is tolerable.

Give me leave to examine before you the Truth of this Assertion.

Some Evils there are which are natural, which are born with us, and from which no Circumstances or Condition of Life can ever deliver us. Such is the Fear of Death: It is a Fear common to Young and Old, to Master and Servant, King and Subject: It arises with the first Dawnings of Reason, and continues with us to its last Decay: It lives with us when we are poor, and forsakes us not when we are rich: It embitters the Misery of the Oppressed, and corrupts the Pleasures of the Mighty. We bring with us into the World such an Aversion to the going out of it, that, to speak in the Language of Scripture, *Through Fear of Death we are all our Life-time subject to Bondage.*

Now take Religion out of the Case, and divest a Man of all Hopes and Confidence in God, and what has he to mitigate or lessen this Evil? You will ask, perhaps,

perhaps, What has he to fear from Death, if God be out of the Question, and there be no Expectation of a Judgment to come? Is it then so easy a Thing to reconcile ourselves to the Prospect of being nothing? Is it an adequate Cure for the Fear of Death, to be certain that we shall die without Hope, and be no more for ever? Nature, we are sure, abhors this Prospect; and if there be in it any Pleasure, it must arise from some very unnatural Cause; and so it always does. It is Sin that makes Men afraid of Judgment, and the Fear of Judgment makes them willing to compound to be nothing. But this is not curing the Fear of Death, but it is chusing Death out of Dread of a much greater Evil: It is flying for Protection to Death to avoid the Terrors of Judgment, as Men leap out of Window when the House is on fire; which is not despising the Fall, but dreading the Flame. It is not a Remedy which Reason would chuse, but which it cannot tell how to avoid. When we prefer a less Evil to a greater, the Nature of Things is not altered by our Choice; the Evil we chuse continues to be an Evil, not eligible in itself, but only in respect of a greater Evil to be avoided. The Man who submits to have a Leg cut off to save his Life, does not think the losing of a Limb to be a desirable Thing, though he may be willing to part with a Limb to save his Life. By the same Reason, Death does not cease to be a natural Evil, nor does the natural Fear of it vanish, when Men hope to die for ever, rather than come to Judgment. It shews, indeed, that they fear Damnation more than Death; but it never can shew, that they have not the same natural Aversion to Death which others have. This Comfort, therefore, this only Comfort, which Irreligion affords, is indeed no Support at all against the natural Fear of Death: If any thing, it is a Support against

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against the Fear of Guilt, but no Support against the Fear of Death. For, suppose the Man who believes nothing of the Being of God, to be however a Man of moral Virtue, and clear of all Guilt which may create a Fear of future Judgment, What Comfort have you to give such an one against the natural Aversion to Death? Death will deliver him from nothing, and therefore he can have no Hope in it. It will rob him of himself, of every thing; and unless he be so unnatural as to have no Regard for himself, or any thing else, the Prospect of it must be a constant Uneasiness to him. Will you bid him steel his Mind against these Apprehensions, and resolutely cast all Thoughts of Death behind him? What is this but exhorting him not to exercise his Reason upon a Subject which, of all others, most nearly concerns him? And is this a proper Instruction to a reasonable Creature? It is bidding Men not see what is before them; as if Blindness were a Security against Danger, and Want of Thought a Cure for the natural Evils of human Life: Which, if it be indeed the Case, plainly shews, that we must cease to be Men, and to exercise the Faculties of Men, before we can lose the Sense of these Evils. Such, therefore, as reason in this Manner, confess themselves unable to cure the Evils of Life; since they are forced to destroy the Man to get rid of the Distemper; a Practice which must prove either the Physician to be a Fool, or the Evil to be incurable. Which of the two is the true Case, will appear when we consider, whether Religion affords a proper Remedy against this Evil or no.

Since Death is inevitable, this World can afford no Cure for the Apprehensions of it; nothing on this Side the Grave can calm these Fears of Nature: Riches and Honours are not worth mentioning in this Question; even the Wisdom of the World, and all the solemn
Lectures

Lectures of Philosophy against the Fear of Death, are but like Cordials given to Criminals before Execution, which lessen their Fears only in Proportion as they weaken their Sense and Understanding. Since then we must necessarily die, the Fear of Death can be allayed by nothing but the Hope of living again: If we can have any good Grounds upon which we may entertain this Hope, it is evident what an Alteration it makes in the Case: Death is no longer the same Thing, it is a Sleep from which we expect to wake to Immortality: It is a Step from a Life of Misery to a Life of Peace and Pleasure, attended with no Fears but what are swallowed up in the blessed Expectation of Eternity. This is the very Hope which Religion affords. The Man who believes in God, and has a Trust and Confidence in his Power, Wisdom and Goodness, sees manifold Reason to believe, that God made him for better Purposes, than to live a few Years upon this Stage in Misery and Affliction: He cannot suppose that a Being of such Excellency of Wisdom and Goodness sent him into the World merely to live in perpetual Fears of going out of it again. All the visible Works of Nature are liable to Decay and Dissolution; and in that we are mortal, we are akin to all Things round us: But then, of all the Works of God, Man alone lives in continual Apprehensions of his Dissolution: The material World is void of Sense, and therefore void of Fear; the Brutes have so much Fear of present Danger, as is necessary to their Preservation; but remove from them immediate Danger, and they shew no Signs of the Fear of Death. This Fear therefore, which is peculiar to Man, if it serves no Purpose beyond this World, is an additional Misery, which makes the Condition of Man to be worse than that of the Brute which perishes. What shall we say then? That God has made

made all Things perfect in their Kind, and suited to their natural Enjoyments; and created Man only for Misery and Affliction? God forbid. The Truth is, That the Creatures, made for this World, have such Fears only as are necessary for their Preservation in the World: But Man, ordained to eternal Life, has such Desires of Life, such Fears of Death implanted in him, as are necessary to preserve to him that Immortality to which he is created: These Fears of Death are perpetual Calls to him to secure to himself that Life which shall never fail; they are constant Intimations to him to wean himself from this World, which will so soon fail, and to look out for a more certain abiding Place. This is the Language of God, speaking to us by the Fears and the Hopes of Nature; these are the Comforts which refresh the Soul in the Multitude of Thoughts which distract it.

But does not this Hope, you will say, bring with it a great Increase of Fear? The Man who lives without God, may shrink sometimes at the Thoughts of Death, and the Apprehensions of falling into nothing: But the Believer has a much greater Terror, even the Terror of Damnation, to alarm every Fear and Suspicion of his Soul, and to keep him upon a perpetual Rack. He lives in a State of Insecurity; perfect he is not, but often sins; and every Sin refreshes all his Fears, and places the awful Judge, armed with Anger and Vengeance, full in his Sight. Put this into his Scale, and see which is the happier Man, he who has only natural Death to fear, or he who fears Damnation also.

True it is, there is no Comparison between the Fear of temporal Death, and of Death eternal: *Fear not them, says our Saviour, who can only kill the Body, but fear him who can cast both Body and Soul into Hell-Fire:* A plain Intimation, were any Intimation wanting in
so

to plain a Case, that there is no Comparison to be made between the Fears. But then it must be considered, that the Hopes and Fears of Futurity are not Things of our own Invention; they will not come at our calling, and go at our bidding; for Men hardly fear Death itself more naturally, than they do a Judgment to come; And the Difference between a religious Man, and an irreligious Man, does not lie in this, that one fears a future Judgment, and the other fears it not; for, commonly speaking, both fear it, and he the most who has least Religion. It is no unusual Thing for Men to deny God in their Actions, who confess him in their Fears and Apprehensions: And the Bravery of Irreligion consists more in hiding these Fears from the World, than in being able to throw them out of the Mind. This being the Case, it is very evident, that the natural Fear of Death is very much heightened by the Fears of Futurity; which are very corroding and exasperating, where there are no Hopes to mitigate and allay them: And this is the irreligious Man's Case; he loses all the Hopes of Futurity by his Irreligion, but cannot get rid of the Terrors and Apprehensions of it. And though the religious Man may often have Reason to fear, yet even his Fear is a Symptom of Health, and is working towards the Repentance not to be repented of: *For the Lord is his Refuge, and God is the Strength of his Confidence.*

But suppose the religious Man to be surrounded with the Fears of Futurity, if he has Reason for his Fears he must blame himself, and not his Religion: Religion wants not its Comforts, however some who have a Sense of Religion may, possibly, be too wicked to be capable of any: Be this as it will, certain it is, that the Fear of Death arises from Nature, and is common to all; but admits of no Cure, but from the Comforts
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DISCOURSE XII. 187

and Consolations which Religion administers. But to proceed:

There are many other Evils and Calamities in Life, which prove daily Occasions of Sorrow and Affliction to us; so many they are, that it would be endless to enumerate them: These are so constantly near us, and do so often overtake us, that a wise Man would, if it be possible, always be provided with a Remedy. In private Life, we suffer often unexpectedly in our Fortune, in the Loss of Acquaintance, Friends and Relations, and find ourselves bereaved of those Comforts of Life which were our greatest Enjoyments; and not only so, but given up a Prey to Sorrow and Vexation of Spirit: What shall we do in this Case? where shall we look out for Ease? The World has little Pity, and yet less Help for such Sufferers: Much less Help still has it for those, who are seemingly fortunate and prosperous, and live surrounded with Plenty and Abundance, but are secretly unhappy, restless and dissatisfied in their Minds, and utterly void of that inward Peace which is the only Source of Pleasure. Thousands there are of this Sort, who possess all the World can give, and yet have nothing to enjoy. Others, though they have nothing to disquiet them at present, and have all they wish for, have yet an Art to torment themselves, by raising sad Prospects at a Distance, and bringing within their View all the Calamities which a warm Imagination can represent. Consider now upon what Foot you will place human Happiness: Take the good Things of the World, divide them as you please, and try how many you can make easy. You will soon see some employing your Gifts in the Purchase of Vice and Distempers; and growing extremely miserable, by having these Means of Happiness put into their Hands. Some you will see worn out with the Care and Anxiety of pre-
serving,

serving, others tormented with losing their Share; some restless and uneasy, whose Minds no outward Fortune can cure; some fearful and suspicious, with whom no Peace can dwell; and all perhaps secretly dissatisfied with the prosperous Condition in which you have placed them. If this be the Condition of human Life, and that it is every Day's Experience bears witness, we must look out for something more solid and lasting than this World affords, if ever we mean to be happy in it: We must find that Thing, whatever it is, that can preserve us, in the midst of Plenty, from being undone by the Allurements and Temptations of the World; that can secure our Peace against the Casualties of Fortune, and the Torments which the Disappointments of the World bring with them; that can save us from the Cares and Solitudes which attend upon large Possessions, and give us a Mind capable of relishing the good Things before us; easy and satisfied as to the present, secure and void of Fear as to the future. And what is this Remedy? and who is he that can supply it? He only it is who is the Author of every good and perfect Gift; whom to know and to love, is a perpetual Spring of Joy and Felicity. The Man who enjoys the World under a Sense of Religion, and of the Power and Goodness of God, will so use the World as not to abuse it; will look upon the Uncertainties of Life with the Unconcernedness of a Man who knows he has a much nobler Possession, of which no one can rob him: He will part with his Riches without Torment, he will keep them without Anxiety, and use them so as to make them a Blessing to himself and all around him. If the Course of the World be disordered, and threatens the Inhabitants thereof with Calamity and Distress, he will maintain his inward Peace, knowing that *the Lord is King, be the Earth ever so unquiet*: He will look with

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Pleasure into all the Scenes of Futurity, being well assured, that the World that now is, and the World that is to come, are in the Hands of God. These are the Comforts which, in the Multitude of Sorrows which surround us, will refresh the Soul of a religious Man, whilst they who forget God are spending a wretched Life, in lamenting over the Misfortunes of this World, and are ending it to begin a more wretched Life in the World that is to come.

As the Comforts flowing from a true Sense of Religion, are the only true Support of the Spirit of a Man, in all Circumstances and Conditions; so the Loss of them is frequently attended with a Misery, of all others the sharpest, and which the Mind of Man can least bear. We call this Misery by the Name of Despair: A Grief it is, which pierces through the Soul, and racks it in every Part: There are two Sorts of it. One has God for its Object, but God clothed in Anger and Vengeance; it has no Trust or Confidence in him; it is all Fear and Dread, as living under a Being supposed to want no Power, and to have no Mercy; or thinking itself incapable of all Mercy, as a Vessel of Wrath, fitted to Destruction: The other disbelieves the Being of a God, or his Providence and Care over his Creatures; it sees the World in Disorder and Confusion, the Righteous afflicted, the Wicked in great Prosperity, and hastily concludes, *that there is no God*, or that he regards none of these Things: A Conclusion which either fills our Hearts with all the Pains of desponding Melancholy, seeing ourselves surrounded with innumerable Troubles, and no helping Hand near to lend us Assistance; or else makes them obdurate and *fully set to do evil*, seeing the Prosperity of the Wicked, and none near to call them to account. Need I now add any thing to shew the Wretchedness of these Conditions?

Is it not a miserable State to live in a World where no Justice is to be expected; to struggle not only with the Accidents of Life, but with the Wickedness of Men; with the Violence of the Oppressor, with the Fraud of the Deceitful, with the Envy of the Malicious, and with the Jealousies and Suspicions of all about us? To have all our Hopes and Expectations confined within this narrow Scene of Wickedness and Confusion, and no Power to over-rule this Disorder, no Hand to guide us through the Storm? Is it not still more wretched to live under the constant Dread of an incensed Power; in daily Expectation of the Time shortly to come, which will deliver us up to his Wrath; a Wrath which no Repentance can appease, no Tears can soften? No Imagination can form to itself a Misery exceeding this.

These are the Sorrows to which we are exposed, when once we let go our Trust and Confidence in God, and render ourselves incapable of his Comforts. As long as we have Hope in God, we see our Way through the World, and move within Sight of a sure Haven of Rest and Peace: If the Wicked prosper, we know there is a Day of Account; if the Righteous suffer, we know his Reward is not far off: If all Things about us seem disturbed, we know whose Word can bring Order out of Confusion: Whatever our State and Condition are, we possess our Souls in Patience, and in full Assurance that all Things are subject to Him, who is our God, and our Redeemer.

I shall detain you no longer than to lay two Consequences before you, arising from what has been said. First, Since the Evils of Life do so necessarily force us to have resort to the Comforts of Religion, being capable of no other Cure or Remedy, it may shew us some Marks of God's Goodness and Care of us,

even

even in his permitting these many Evils in the World : They are so many Calls to us, to search out and secure to ourselves that real Happiness to which we are ordained. Had we been made for this World only, it would be impossible to imagine a Reason, why a Being of infinite Goodness should place us in the midst of so many Fears and Sorrows : But as we are formed for a more lasting State than this, and are placed here for our Trial only, it was necessary and agreeable to the wise Ends of Providence to surround us on all Sides, with Warnings not to set up our Rest here, but to remember, and with all our Might to labour for the Life that shall never perish. To this End the Evils of the World are very subservient ; they are diffused through all Conditions of Life, and are Calls to Persons of all Conditions to remember God in all their Ways, and to keep a stedfast Eye upon the Things *which God has prepared for those who love him.*

Secondly, Since the Evils of Life cannot be avoided, nor yet be cured without the Helps and Assistances which Religion alone can afford ; let us consider, what a sad Choice we make for ourselves, when we throw from us the Hopes and Comforts which flow from a due Acknowledgment of God. If we have Hope in this Life only, we must be miserable. We are born to Misery, and we must die to be happy. But if we add to the Terrors of Death, by renouncing or forfeiting all Hopes of Futurity ; if we corrupt the few Pleasures of Life by the Fears of Guilt, and give Weight and Sharpness to all our other Afflictions, by a fearful looking for of Judgment to come ; our Condition, even in this World, will be deplorable, and our Life but one continued Scene of hopeless Misery. As we value therefore even the Pleasures of this Life,
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and our Share in the good Things of the World, which the Providence of God has placed before us, let us keep ourselves in a Capacity of enjoying them, by holding fast the Comforts of Religion. These only can give us a true Relish of our Pleasures; these only can enable us to bear like Men our Share of Evil and Affliction: Our Hearts will often be disquieted within us, and we shall, *in the Multitude of our Thoughts*, find a Multitude of Sorrows: Let us therefore keep God our Friend, *whose Comforts will refresh our Souls.*



DISCOURSE XII

DISCOURSE XIII.

PART I.

PSALM lxxxviii. 15.

While I suffer thy Terrors, I am distracted.

SE. S the Comforts which true Religion affords are the only sure Support against the Evils and Calamities of the World, to which every Condition of Life is more or less exposed; so the Terrors of Religion, being very grievous in themselves, exclusive of these Comforts, add Weight to all our Miseries, and are a Burden too heavy for the Spirit of a Man to sustain. But surely there is something monstrous in such Terrors! They come not from Religion by natural Birth: For it is much easier to believe, that all we see is Chance and Fortune, and Religion itself a vain Thing, than to believe that an all-wise all-powerful Being has formed us to be miserable, and given us a

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Sense and Knowledge of himself, that we may live in perpetual Terror and Distraction. And yet, in fact, this is often the Case; we see many rendered unhappy by such Fears and Jealousies: And of all the Fears incident to Man, these are the most fearful, and give us the quickest Sense of Misery; they are, what the Psalmist has described them to be, *Distraction*. A Man in this sad State employs all his Reason to his own Destruction; he is sagacious in finding out new Torment for himself, and can give a thousand Reasons to justify his unreasonable Fears: If you offer a thousand more for his Comfort and Consolation, he rejects them all; his Mind is under so thick a Cloud, that no Ray of Light can find Admittance. This Evil is the more to be lamented, because Virtue and Innocence are not always a Security against it; nay, sometimes the very Desire to be better than we are, and to render ourselves more acceptable to God, makes us think ourselves to be worse than we are, and quite out of his Favour. What a wretched State is this! to sustain at once the Burden of the Righteous, and of the Wicked; to deny ourselves and the World for the Sake of God, and yet to suffer under the sorest Evils, which can befall even the Wicked in this Life, the Torments of a distracted Mind!

But bad as this Case is, it is not always the worst of the Case: For, as to such who suffer under these Terrors, and yet retain their Integrity, there is this Comfort, which, whether they can receive it now or no, they will one Day find, That however they deal with themselves, yet God will judge a righteous Judgment; and, for the Sake of their Innocence, deliver them from the Fears of the Guilty. But others there are, who, not able to bear these Fears of Religion,

ligion, in the Haste they make to run from them, leave Religion itself behind them; and imagining that they cannot be good enough to obtain the Rewards of Religion, take effectual Care to be bad enough to deserve the Punishment of it. This is evidently their Condition, who fortify themselves against the Apprehensions of Futurity by Vice and Intemperance; and seem to have no greater Concern upon them in this Life, than to secure themselves from Thought and Reflection. This may likewise, in some Measure, be their Case, who employ all their Reason in hardening their Minds against the Sense of Religion; who seem to think it an easier Matter to arrive at Peace, by rejecting the Belief of a God, than to come to any reasonable Terms with him, and to find Comfort and Security under the Apprehensions of his Power and Majesty. This irreligious Phrenzy is, of the two, the greatest; and will, in its Consequences, be more fatal than the other. A weak Man, who fears God more than he should do, may be worthy of Compassion; but the bold Man, who despises him, has no Reason to expect any.

In whatever View we consider the Effects of these Terrors of Religion, they afford us but a melancholy Prospect: It is a sad Thing to see the Wicked desperate, or the Righteous in despair. Were these Terrors the natural Effects of that Fear of God which is the Foundation of all true Religion, Religion itself would be Distraction, and not the reasonable Service of a reasonable Creature; unless you can imagine, that he who made us reasonable Creatures, and distinguished us by the nobler Faculties of the Mind, can take Pleasure in seeing us lose our Reason and Understanding.

But since these Terrors do often assume the Shape and Form of Religion, and are almost always charged to its Account; it may be for a Service to true Religion to shew the several Kinds of these Terrors, and the real Causes of them: And it will be for our common Instruction to consider, at the same time, the Vanity of those Remedies which Men often have recourse to under these Evils; and, as far as the Generality of the Case will permit, to point out the true Cure for them.

As to the Causes and Kinds of these Terrors, they may be reduced, I think, to the following Heads: They are such as arise, either, first, from Uncertainty in Religion; or, secondly, from false Notions of God, and of the Honour and Worship due to him; or, thirdly, from a Conscience wounded with a Sense of Guilt; or, lastly, from some accidental Infirmities of Mind or Body.

It is a Matter of Doubt, Whether there be any of human Race so absolutely degenerate, as to be void of all Sense of Religion: That there are any such has not yet been proved, though the Point has been much laboured: But if any such there be, they are evidently out of the present Question: For, whatever Anxieties may reach Men in such a State of Stupidity, they cannot be ascribed to Religion, from the Sense of which the Sufferers are supposed to be exempted. But many there are whose Minds are disturbed with perpetual Variety of Opinions, and enjoy no more Rest than a Ship left to the Mercy of the Winds in a tempestuous Sea. The Concern which every Man has in the Issue of Religion, is too great to be submitted with Indifference to Chance and Uncertainty: For the Question before him is, Whether he must die like
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the Beasts that perish, or rise again to Immortality; whether he is at Liberty to pursue all his Inclinations here without Controul; or whether he stands accountable to a Judgment to come, to be held in his Presence who is the Lord of Life and Death, and will recompence to every Man the Work which he hath done. If he holds his Mind in Doubt and Suspense, as to this great Event, he divests himself of all the Hopes and Comforts of Religion, and leaves Room for all its Fears and Terrors to take Possession of his Heart: For he can have no true Joy in the Prospect of the Pleasures of another World, which, for ought he knows, may be all Delusion; nor can he enjoy the Pleasures of this World, because of the Fears of Futurity, which, for ought he knows, may be all real, and approaching him every Day. Every Thought of the Heart, labouring under such Uncertainty, brings Torment and Vexation with it; it renders him incapable of all present Joy, and gives no Assurance of any to succeed. The Man who is to cast Lots for his Life, is not more restless and uneasy under the Expectation of what Chance shall determine concerning him, than he is, whose Mind is in Suspense in the great Points of Religion; for these Points have in them Life and Death eternal, and he lives under a perpetual Expectation of a sudden Determination of his Fate; so that he is all his Life-long casting Lots for his Life.

The Uneasiness of this State is such, that no one can endure it long; and in Experience it is true, that all hasten to deliver themselves from these Torments one Way or other. Some labour to shut out all Thought and Reflection upon these Subjects; they fly to Business or Pleasure for Refuge; and because

Business and Pleasure have their Seasons of Remission, and leave the Mind its vacant Hours for Consideration, they are forced to take shelter in Vice and Intemperance, as what alone can secure from the Interruptions of Thought and Reason. Others, resolving to rescue themselves from the Perplexities of an unsettled Mind, use a kind of Force upon themselves in determining their Choice, and resolutely fix upon the Post which they will maintain; and thus some reject all Religion, and some take all, without being able, on either Side, to give a Reason for what they do.

But all these Methods are but so many Arts, by which Men deceive themselves, and gain a false Peace, liable to be disturbed by new Torments and Anxieties; They build without a Foundation; and, when the Winds and Storms arise, their House will fall on their Heads, and cover them in Ruin and Destruction. Let the Man who has long shut out Thought and Reflection, and, through the Power of Vice and Intemperance, has arrived at his much desired State of Stupidity; let him, I say, be but awakened out of this Lethargy by some uncommon Calamity; or let Sickness and Infirmary render him incapable of Vice, and discharge those Fetters with which his Mind was bound; and all his Fears will return with double Force; they will appear no longer in the Form of Doubts and Uncertainties, but will come upon him as the Terrors of Guilt armed with Vengeance; and he will soon find, that the Method he took to deliver himself from the Uncertainties of Religion, has delivered him from nothing but the Hopes and Comforts of it, and bound upon his Soul all its Fears and Terrors without Remedy. So, again, If the Man who is an Unbeliever upon the Strength of his Will, without

without the Consent of his Understanding, meets with any Shock to disturb his ill-grounded Peace, his Mind will certainly recoil; and, like a Spring, when the Weight that held it is removed, return to its natural State. Whoever, in these great Concerns of Life, determines himself without asking Advice of his Reason, and taking the Assent of his Mind along with him, will certainly find, sooner or later, that Reason will revenge the Affront, and make him pay dear for neglecting so faithful a Counsellor. And, when such Fears and Uncertainties return, the second State is much worse than the first: For now they come attended with a Consciousness of an obstinate and resolute Opposition to God, of an Endeavour to harden our Hearts against all Sense of Religion; which, be Religion true or false, no Sense or Reason can justify.

But what shall we say of such, who prefer Religion notwithstanding all their Doubts, who voluntarily submit to the Duties of it, and chuse even its uncertain Hopes before the present Pleasures of the World? Are not such in a safe Way? I trust in God, many such are: But I must remind you, that the Question before us is not, how safe they are, but how they are affected by the Fears and Terrors of Religion. And even, as to this Point, the Varieties in this Case are so many and great, that the same Considerations will not reach all who are in this Condition. Some there may be who believe the Being of God and his Providence, who see the Difference between moral Good and Evil, and own all the Obligations arising from thence on rational Beings; but may doubt perhaps as to their own State after this Life, and whether God intends them for any thing beyond this World; and yet they may think it highly reasonable and be-

coming them to worship and obey God, as much as others, who have better and greater Expectations from him for themselves. You have in this Description the very best of this Case before you; and yet, under these Circumstances, Religion is all Labour, and no Benefit: For no Man can be so blind, as to think Religion a safe Way to worldly Prosperity and Happiness; and, if it is not sure of a future Reward, there is no Security in it. Here is no Remedy in such Religion against the natural Fear of Death, to which all are subject; no Consolation against the many Evils and Afflictions of Life, from all of which none are free. When we are surrounded with Difficulties and Distress, this Religion shews us not the Way to escape, but gives us up to our present Sufferings, void of better Hopes and Expectations; at least, uncertain of Comfort or Relief. Besides, how can a Man possibly maintain a just and true Notion of God, under such a Persuasion as this? We are sure the best Men often have a Portion of Misery in this World; and if we are not persuaded that there is something better for them in reserve hereafter, it is impossible to justify to ourselves the Goodness of God towards the Children of Men: And yet, without this, Religion must be all Terror, consisting in the Belief of an absolute Power over us, but a Power not rendered amiable by Goodness or Mercy. While Men are easy in the World, they may find some Satisfaction in such a kind of Belief, and value themselves perhaps for the Submission they pay to God, without being solicitous what shall become of themselves; but Distress will shake them, and the Sorrows of the World will prove their Religion to be void of Comfort.

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But the worst of this Case is, when Men resolve to be religious out of Fear, and merely to secure themselves from some dreadful Apprehensions which they have on their Minds; such Religion, as it begins in Fear, so it lives perpetually in Fear, and carries with it all its Fears at least as far as the Grave. When Religion arises from a just Notion of God, and from a right Apprehension of what is due from a reasonable Creature to his reasonable Maker and Governor, there is Peace and Satisfaction in every Step of it; every Act of Religion carries with it the Approbation of our own Minds, and is followed by a Contentment which nothing can disturb. But he who is religious, not because he knows it is right for him so to be, but because he dreads to be otherwise, can never know that he is right in any thing he does, but will naturally fall into all the Methods of Superstition, which some weak ones, and some wise in this World, agree to call Religion. Hence it is, that some, who seem most devoutly disposed, are under a perpetual Uneasiness of Mind, and never satisfied that they have done any thing as they ought to do. Others, seeing Men of such Application to the Duties of Religion under such anxious Concern about it, conclude, that Religion is a most burdensome Thing, and that the wisest Way is to be contented without inquiring much after it. Whether they who make this Conclusion, or they who administer Occasion for it, are the wiser, is no easy Matter to determine: Certain it is, that the Fear of God, which is the Foundation of true Religion, differs as much from these Fears of Ignorance and Superstition, as one Thing can well differ from another. The religious Man fears God because he knows him; and therefore he fears him,

as a wise, just, good, and merciful Father and Judge ought to be feared : His Fear is full of Love and Reverence, and has nothing dreadful in it, unless Guilt and a wounded Conscience arm it with unnatural Terrors : But the superstitious Man fears God just as Children and weak Men fear Spirits and Apparitions ; he trembles at the Thought of him, he flies from he knows not what, seeks Refuge he knows not where ; and this Hurry and Confusion of Mind he calls *Religion* ; but the Psalmist has given it a better Name, it is *Distraction*.

You see how unsuccessful all these Attempts are to cure the Fears which arise from Doubts and Uncertainties in Religion : These Remedies increase the Distemper, and heighten the Fear till it comes to be a Phrenzy, and too strong to submit to the Cure of Reason and sober Sense. What must be done then ? Will you exhort us to cast away all Doubts, and to be certain and positive in all Points of Religion ? I know full well, that this is no proper Subject for Exhortation ; but I will exhort you to be diligent Inquirers after God. That you have Reason, you are apt enough to boast : That God has provided proper Employment for your Reason, the manifold Works of Nature and Providence bear witness : These are the visible Things of God, which will guide you by a sure Clue to the Acknowledgment of the invisible Author. And this Inquiry, as it is the first in Order of Nature with regard to religious Knowledge, so is it the first likewise with regard to the Peace and Comforts of Religion ; And it is with this View that I recommend this Inquiry, as a Cure for those Terrors which are apt to seize upon unsettled Minds. Till we have a right Notion of God and his Attributes, it is impossible we should be able to judge of any
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Case of Religion: We may be very learned in all the Doctrines and Disputes of this and of past Ages; and it is a Learning which may well make us mad, if we have no Rule to guide us through all the Difficulties that surround us: But he who has fixed in his Mind a just Notion of God, and of his Attributes, will find his Way to Peace, be the Darkness about him ever so thick. It is a great Misfortune to a Man to know much of Religion, and little of God: Such a Man's Religion must either be his Plague or his Contempt; it must appear to him either ridiculous or terrible: And let him take it which Way he will, he will find a Terror in it at last. It is in vain therefore to seek for Satisfaction till we know God, till we can say to our Hearts, *We know in whom we have trusted.* This will make our Religion become an holy and reverential Fear, unmix'd with Terror and Confusion; it will make our Knowledge in religious Matters become a Wisdom unto Salvation; and preserve to us that true Freedom of Mind, to which as well the Scoffers of the Age as the Superstitious are mere Strangers.

Secondly, False Notions of God, and of the Honour and Worship due to him, are another Source of religious Terrors. What has been already said of the true Notion of God may suffice to shew, how destructive all false Notions of God are to the Peace of Mankind: And as false Notions of the Honour and Worship due to God derive themselves from the false Notions which Men entertain of God himself, there is no great Difference in the Cases, and both are to be resolv'd upon the same Reason: This latter may indeed be illustrated by great Variety of historical Evidence. What was their Case, who sacrificed their Sons and their Daughters, and gave the Fruit of their

Body as an Atonement for the Sin of their Soul? What was theirs, who cut themselves with Knives in Honour of their God, and endeavoured to move his Compassion, not with the Sorrow, but with the Blood of their Hearts? I wish all Instances of this Sort were confined to the heathen World, and had never corrupted the Doctrines of Christ. But what must we say to the tedious and expensive Pilgrimages and Processions, what to the unnatural Mortifications and sullen Retirements from the World, practised and recommended in some Parts of the Christian Church? Are not all these Marks of slavish Fear, and of a Religion that carries Terror with it? Were you to instruct an ignorant Person in the Nature of God, by telling him that he takes Delight in seeing Men punish and afflict themselves, in seeing them divest themselves of all Comforts of Life, and retire to a State of mournful Silence and Solitude; what would he think this Being was? Would he not imagine him to want Benevolence and Kindness towards his Creatures, and that his Service was a State of Slavery and Misery? Doubtless he would.

To this Head we may refer the Terrors which arise from the unwarranted Expectations which Men raise to themselves from Religion, which seldom fail to be a Plague and a Torment to them at the last. One enters with Warmth and Zeal into the Service of God, not doubting but he shall find it turn to very good Account in his worldly Affairs: He resolves to be very good, and expects to be very rich and prosperous. As soon as any Calamity befalls him, he is surprized, confounded, all his Hopes and Comforts vanish; and he begins to think himself forsaken of God, and given up to Destruction. Another, perhaps, fallen into Dis-

stress,

strest, takes up a religious Purpose to apply himself to God by Prayer: If he meets not with the Deliverance he expects, (and surely our Petitions ought not in Reason to prescribe to Providence) he falls into the very Fears before described, and thinks that God regards him not. This seems to have been the Psalmist's Case; for thus he describes his own Woe: *I have cried Day and Night before thee.—Why castest thou off my Soul? Why hidest thou thy Face from me?—*

Such Persons as these are not apt to seek a Remedy, nor yet to admit any: They submit to Sorrow and Despair: And it seems to be their only Comfort to refuse Comfort; by this they think they make a right Sacrifice to God's Justice, giving up to Misery the Soul which he abhors. Now if true Religion teaches you to expect temporal Prosperity as the certain Reward of serving God; if it has engaged to you, that all your Prayers, without Distinction, shall be answered; that every Affliction, though sent perhaps for your Good and your Correction, shall be removed as soon as you desire it; then charge all these Sufferings to the Account of true Religion: But if Religion has taught you no such Lesson, beware how you charge God foolishly, and call that Unfaithfulness in him; which is in Truth the Folly and Weakness of Man.

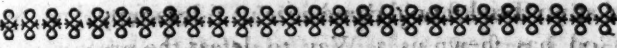
Now as these Terrors are hard to be cured, when once they have got Possession of the Mind, for they are obstinate against Reason and Advice, so there is the more Reason to guard against them before they come. We ought, in all Conditions of Life, to limit our Hopes and Expectations within the Bounds of Probability, otherwise we expose ourselves to perpetual Disappointments and Vexation. The same Rule is necessary to be observed in Religion: We ought never to expect more from God than he has expressly promised,

promised, or than he may grant consistently with the Measures by which his Providence rules and governs the World: If we exceed these Bounds, Religion, instead of being our Comfort, will soon become our Torment; but we, and not Religion, will be to blame. If we consider that this World is a State of Trial, and that Afflictions are Trials, we can never lay it down to ourselves, that God will relieve us at our Request from all Afflictions; for this would be owning ourselves in a State of Trial, and, at the same Time, expecting that no Trial should come near us. It is supposing that God has shewn us a Way to defeat the great End of his Providence in sending us into this World; he sent us here to be proved, and yet we think to prevail on him not to prove us. In the great End which we ought to propose by our Religion, the Salvation of our Souls, we can never be disappointed, but through our own Fault. This is our true Comfort, and it is sufficient to support us under the Evils of the Life that now is, and to deliver us from the Fears of that which is to come.

You see now, from this Discourse, that Religion, though it may minister Occasion, is not the Cause of these Terrors. But you may reply, Were there no Sense of Religion, there could be no such Terrors. Very right; and it is as true, that were there no Reason, there would be no such Apprehensions. Will you blame God now for making you rational Creatures? If not, you must not blame him for making you capable of Religion; but you must use the Reason he has given you to search after and know him, and then your Religion will be your Comfort. Then will you be able to say to yourself, and declare to others, *Her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace.*



DISCOURSE XIII.



PART II.



WO other Kinds of religious Terror, together with their Causes, remain to be considered; and they are the Terrors of Guilt, and the Terrors which owe their Rise to the accidental Disorders or Infirmities of Mind or Body. To proceed then:

The Terrors of Guilt are those which can alone pretend to be consonant to the Notions of true Religion, and to derive themselves by just Consequence from them. If there be any Truth in Religion, Natural or Revealed, it is most certain, *That God will judge the World in Righteousness, and render to every Man according to his Work; to those who do well, Life and Happiness; to those who obey Unrighteousness, Indignation and Wrath.* As this Belief will be attended with Peace and Comfort of Mind, where Men sincerely endeavour to perfect Holiness in the Fear of God, so must it necessarily

rily produce *Tribulation and Anguish in every Soul that doth Evil*. This is so plain and evident a Case, that I think no one will demand a Reason why it is, or must be so. The Fear of Damnation is, without all Question, a reasonable Fear; and it would be a very presumptuous, as well as a fruitless Attempt, to persuade a Man to live without Fear, who apprehends himself to be in such a State. Weak and superstitious Minds do often indeed form very wrong Judgments concerning their own State and Condition towards God; in which Case, though the Judgment itself be erroneous, yet the Fear is natural, and connected to the Judgment by just Consequence. It is a great Work of Charity to assist such weak Persons, and to enable them to think better of God than they do, and not worse of themselves than they deserve; and by such Means to restore Peace and Quiet to their Minds: But to endeavour to remove their Fears, without correcting the false Opinions from which they proceed, must be the Effect of great Folly or great Impiety. If you imagine the Case capable of Comfort and Consolation, the conceived Opinion of having merited God's Wrath not being removed, it is a Sign of great Weakness, and Ignorance in the Nature both of God and Man: Or, if you would raise a Courage to encounter these Fears, and inspire Sinners with an Hardiness against the Apprehensions of Futurity, you can only hope to throw them into the other Extreme; for such an hardy Contempt of God's Judgments cannot consist with a rational Sense of Religion. These Fears, proceeding from Guilt, are both natural and rational; it is impossible therefore that either Nature or Reason should afford any Assistance, or sufficient Remedy against these Terrors; unless we suppose Reason and Nature to be made up of Contradictions. Is it a natural State of the Mind to be at ease when

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real Dangers surround us? Is it rational to be unconcerned for ourselves when we are within view of endless Misery? If not, he must be in a very unnatural State who can separate between his Guilt and his Fears.

The Power of Conscience is seen in all Men; it is common to all Countries, to all Religions; to the Learned and Unlearned, to Rich and Poor: It is an essential Character of a rational Mind; and therefore to Man, who is a rational Creature, it is natural. When we offend wilfully against our Sense of Good and Evil, Conscience never fails to reproach and torment us with the Apprehensions of Evil and Misery to befall us: And though Nature has not furnished us with a distinct Knowledge of the Misery prepared for the Wicked, yet natural Conscience gives every wicked Man a certain Expectation of it.

These natural Fears of Conscience are also rational Fears: There are some natural Fears planted in us for wise Purposes, which yet our Reason will teach us in great Measure to overcome. Such is the natural Fear of Death, all Men have it; but the more we consult our Reason and Religion about it, the less will our Fear be: They will furnish our Minds with Comfort against this Terror, and enable us to expect it with Calmness and Tranquillity of Mind: But the Case is otherwise in the Fears of Guilt; the more we advise with our Reason, the better Ground we shall find for these Fears; the more we consult the Principles of Religion, the more certainly we shall be persuaded that the Fears of the Guilty are no Delusions, but real Terrors. How then shall we escape these Terrors, which Nature, Reason, and Religion have bound upon the guilty Mind with so strong Cords?

So hard it is to get rid of these Terrors, that, in many Cases, they grow up to the full Stature of
Distraction;

Distraction; and are too strong for all the Assistance and Comfort that can be administered. When this is the Case, a Sinner is a woful Spectacle; the Grief of his Soul may be read in his Countenance, from which all Chearfulness is banished, and nothing to be seen but Melancholy and Despair. His Days are without Pleasure, and his Nights without Rest; He hates the Company of his Friends, and if he retires, it is to converse with the worst Enemy he has, that is, with himself: His Life is one Scene of Misery, and he lives only because he is afraid to die. The Horrors of his Mind no Words can describe, all his Thoughts work together to torment him; his Imagination calls him every Day to Judgment, and sends him back condemned: Amidst these Tortures his *Strength faileth, and his Life draweth nigh unto the Grave*, and he dies of a guilty Conscience; a Distemper which no Medicine can reach, no Art can succour.

Now this Misery being so great and unsupportable, and all Men so liable to it in Consequence of Sin, we may well imagine that the Wit and Invention of Mankind have been constantly at work to find a Remedy for this sore Disease. Natural Conscience and Reason make the Connection between Guilt and Fear; remove these, and the Fears must vanish; as is evident in the Case of Ideots and Madmen, who often do great Mischief without shewing any Concern, or Trouble for their Actions: This is one of the Devices which profligate Sinners have found out to ease their Burden: They bid Defiance to Conscience and Reason, and set themselves resolutely to despise both God and Man. Where there is great Strength of Body, joined with a rude and brutish Courage, this Method may do for a while, but Time will always shew the Folly of it.

Others,

Others, who are not capable of such outrageous Impiety, and yet can as little bear the Reproaches of Conscience and Reason, are often tempted to give themselves up to Excess of Vice and Intemperance; they find Ease in losing their Understanding, and their Pains abate as they grow incapable of Reflection. How miserable are the Terrors of Guilt, which can make Men willing to forget themselves, that they may forget their Fears!

But these are very unnatural Methods; and which but few, in Comparison, are capable of using; and yet the Case before us is a general Case, concerning all Men, as they are Sinners, and have more or less offended against the Light and Reason of their own Minds. Let us consider then, what more general and rational Methods have been approved for the Cure of this Evil: These are to be found in the several Forms of Religion, which do or have prevailed in the World; all of them pretending to reconcile Sinners to God, some by one kind of Expiation, some by another. It would be endless to set before you the particular Methods used under the several Forms of Religion: It is a Question of much more Importance to inquire, Whether Reason and Natural Religion can possibly furnish a Remedy for this Evil or no.

All Methods applicable to this Purpose may be reduced to two general Heads; to External Rites and Ceremonies, and to Internal Acts of the Mind.

As to External Rites and Ceremonies, they are to be found in great Abundance: We meet with Sacrifices, Oblations, Washings, and Cleansings, in almost all Parts of the World, both among Jews and Heathens. How these several Rites came to be applied to the Purposes of Religion, is a Matter not easily to be accounted for: It will be allowed, I suppose, that nothing
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ought to be esteemed a Part of the Religion of Reason, for which no Reason can be assigned: And yet, who can say upon what Principle he proceeded, who first killed a Lamb, or a Kid, and offered it to God as an Expiation for Guilt, or as a proper Means of obtaining his Blessing and Protection? What Connection is there between the Sin of a Man, and the Sacrifice of an Ox? If I deserve to be punished for Iniquity, can I deserve to be pardoned for shedding the Blood of some poor senseless Animals? Or, what is God, that he should accept such Gifts? what are divine Justice and Mercy, that they should be moved by such Oblations? If these Questions cannot be answered, the Consequence must be, that these external Performances are no Part of Natural Religion.

The Sacrifices and Oblations under the Law of *Moses* were of divine Institution; and whatever Virtue they had in them, they had it in Consequence of the Institution, and the Promise annexed to it; which is a Point in which mere Natural Religion can have no Concern: And the Author to the *Hebrews* has assured us, That even these Sacrifices *did not make him that did the Service perfect, as pertaining to the Conscience*. The Use he assigns to them is, That they *sanctified to the purifying of the Flesh*, that is, they gave a legal or external Purity; so that he who had duly, in these Methods, done away his Uncleanness, or atoned for his Errors, was a legal Member of the external Church and Commonwealth of *Israel*. But what is this to the taking away of Guilt, and to restoring us to the Favour of God?

It has been pleaded in behalf of Sacrifices, and the like Performances, that they are very expressive Signs of a Sinner's Religion: He who brings a Bullock to the Altar, as an Offering for Sin, confesses his Iniquity; when

when he slays him, he acknowledges before God what he himself ought to suffer; and deprecates the Punishment which he owns to be justly due to himself. Allow all this, and it must appear to you, that these external Performances are in themselves of no Value, but have all their Value from that true Religion, and those Acts of it, of which they are significative. I will not trouble you with inquiring upon what Motives, or Principles of Reason, Natural Religion dresses herself out in Signs and Symbols: The Inquiry is not pertinent to the present Purpose: For be this as it will, the Value of the Signs depends upon the true Value of the Things signified, which are internal Acts: And the Question before us must be determined by considering, Whether the internal Acts of Religion, natural and proper to the State of a Sinner, can expiate Guilt, and restore to the Favour of God?

The Religion of a Sinner is an Application for Pardon; and unless it can prescribe a proper Method for obtaining it, it is useless and insignificant. The two Attributes of God, with which this Religion is chiefly concerned, are his Justice and Mercy: But if we argue, that infinite Justice must necessarily punish all Iniquity, that infinite Mercy must extend to all Offences, we get into a Maze, in which we may wander for ever, without finding any Way to get out. I will suppose therefore (and it is the very Truth) that Justice and Mercy both meet in the Rules of Reason and Equity; and that the Judgments of God are righteous Judgments, free from all such Blemishes as human Judgments are liable to from a weak Inclination to Mercy, or a rigorous Affectation of Justice.

In a Point of mere Natural Religion, I will not expect the Doctrines of Revelation to be admitted as Principles; I will not insist therefore that all Men are Sinners;

Sinners: And I think it will not be denied that great Numbers are; so many, that Natural Religion can be of little Use, if it has no Remedy for this Case.

Now all that Natural Religion has to offer to God in behalf of a Sinner, is the Sorrow of his Heart for what is past, and the Purpose of his Mind to offend no more.

Let us consider this Case: Sorrow for Sin, in such as apprehend they shall certainly and miserably suffer for it, is a very natural Passion: But there is no Virtue in it: It is not so much as the Effect of Choice; for a Man must necessarily grieve, when he is sure he has made himself miserable. It never was made Part of a virtuous Man's Character, that he lived in Fear of the Gallows or the Whipping-Post; and did you know any good Man possessed with such Fears, instead of commending his Temper, you must needs laugh at his Folly. This Observation must cut off all that Repentance which arises merely from Apprehensions of Evil; and much I fear, that it will, in great Measure, disable Natural Religion from finding a Remedy against Guilt. The Generality of Mankind are far from being Philosophers, or able to look back upon their Iniquities with so much Calmness and Judgment, as are necessary to create a just Abhorrence of Vice, and to produce a real Change in the Affections of the Heart, and restore the pure Love of God and of Virtue, where Vice and Lust had been long predominant. Let us allow to such a Change as this all that can be asked in its Behalf: What then? Will you conclude, that the World has no Reason to look beyond Natural Religion for a Remedy against Sin? Will you call that a proper Religion for the World, which is fitted only to the Purposes of perhaps twenty in a Country, and perhaps not to half the Number? God has dealt with Mankind in such

Methods,

Methods, as are suited to that Degree of Reason which he has generally bestowed, and to which Men generally may arrive, under the Cares and Burdens and necessary Employments of Life : And there is nothing more absurd, than to think all Men capable of such Reasonings as some few of distinguished Abilities have arrived at : Especially in the Case of Religion, which is, and ought to be, every Man's Concern, to suppose that the Speculations of a few contemplative Men can be reduced to common Use and Practice, is downright Enthusiasm. All wise Governors have fortified their Laws with Penalties, intending that the Fear of Punishment should keep the Subject from offending; but without ever imagining themselves obliged to spare all such as should discover a Fear of the Punishment, after they had incurred it by Disobedience. Now our Reason being the common Rule by which we judge of the Actions of all reasonable Beings, and by which we ought to regulate our own; how come we to judge it reasonable for God to do that, which, in parallel Circumstances, we never think reasonable to do ourselves? It may be said, that we are not capable of judging in this Case, and distinguishing between the mere Fear of Punishment, and the rational Sorrow for having offended; but God can distinguish, and therefore there is Ground to suppose him to act otherwise than Reason in our Circumstances can oblige us to act. Admit this Difference, and it follows, that all who are willing to reform merely through the Fears and Terrors of Guilt are without Remedy : Which shews, that the far greater Number of Sinners are in an helpless State under Natural Religion.

But let us see what the Condition is of one seriously convinced of the Iniquity of Sin, and purposing to forsake it. The Case supposes him to have sinned so

as to deserve Punishment by all the Rules of Reason and Equity: The Question is, Whether a sincere Alteration of Mind can give him Security of a Pardon. I suppose it agreed by all who admit a future Judgment, that Misery and Happiness are set before us upon some Terms: I suppose likewise, that it will be deemed reasonable for God to act upon such Terms as Reason itself, the Interpreter of God's Will in this Case, proposes to us. Consider now; We come into this World reasonable Creatures, enabled to distinguish between Good and Evil; We find ourselves accountable for our Behaviour to God, our Maker and our Judge: From these Principles the Consequence is certain, That Obedience to the Moral Law is the Condition of Salvation: But how will you come to the Consequence so much wanted, That whoever lives in Disobedience shall be saved, if ever he grows sensible of the Folly and Iniquity of so doing? Is this Condition implied in any Law in the Universe? Would it be a fit Condition for God to propose to Men at their first setting out in a State of Nature? No, you will say, it would enervate the Force of all his Laws. How comes it then to be absolutely fit for God to do that, which it is absolutely unfit he should ever promise or profess? But we depend, you will say, upon the Equity and Goodness of God. You do well: But where do you learn this Equity? How do you find it to be equitable, that Men should live by one Rule, and be judged by another? No Man will affirm, that Reason teaches us to think God and his Law satisfied by sinning, and then repenting: We are not to conduct our Lives by this Rule, why then must we needs be judged by this Rule? especially since it is a confessed Maxim, that the Rule of Life and the Rule of Judgment ought to be the same. It may perhaps be thought, that the Goodness of God

considered,

considered, and the Weakness and Frailty of Man, and his Inability to pay a punctual Obedience in all Things to the Law of Reason; it is a reasonable Construction upon the Law of Nature to expect Pardon for our Failings and Omissions, and that the very Terms of our Obedience carry this equitable Construction with them. This to me seems the most material Thing to be said upon the Subject, and I readily allow it: But the most that can be made of it is, that we shall be intitled to equitable Allowances in the Course of an imperfect Obedience: But it does not come up to the Case of such, who, under all these Allowances, fall from their Obedience, and forfeit the Favour of God. But these are the Persons for whom we seek Relief.

Upon the Whole, it does not appear that Natural Religion has any certain Cure for the Terrors of Guilt; because the Title by Obedience being forfeited, there are no certain Principles of Reason from which we can conclude how far, and to what Instances, the Mercy of God will extend; because we can have no Assurance of ourselves, that our Sorrow is such, and our Resolutions of Amendment such, as may deserve Mercy; and lastly, because this whole Matter, whatever there be in it, is founded upon Reasons and Speculations too exact, and too refined, to be of common Use to Mankind. And this last Reason alone will, I think, sufficiently justify the Wisdom and Goodness of God, in proposing to the World a safe and general Method for the Salvation of Sinners: For what if you have Penetration enough to see a Way for Sinners to escape under Natural Religion; must your great Parts be a Measure for God's dealing with all the World? Shall thousands and thousands live and die without Comfort,

because they cannot reason as you do? This Consideration should make those who have the highest Opinion of themselves, and therefore of Natural Religion, adore the Goodness of God, in condescending to the Infirmities of Men, and shewing them the Way to Mercy, which they were unable to find out. This he has done by the Revelation of the Gospel of Christ Jesus, which is the Sinner's great Charter of Pardon, a certain Remedy against all the Fears and Terrors of Guilt.

Here then is a safe Retreat for the guilty Conscience; here God appears, and gives his own unalterable Word for your Security: The Son of God is your Mediator and High Priest, to offer up and sanctify the Sorrows of a broken Heart; and to bring down spiritual Strength, Joy, and Comfort to the Penitent, and to perfect the Word begun in you by his Grace and Assistance. Let no Man therefore sink under the Terrors of Guilt, but let him approach the Throne of Grace; but if in no Confidence of himself, yet in full Confidence in the Promises made through Christ, by whom, and through whom, every Sinner, who returns to God, shall be saved.

After so much done for the Security of Sinners on God's Part, and such great Consolations provided against the Terrors of Guilt, it is much to be lamented there should be any still incapable of Comfort: Yet such there are, of whom I proposed to speak in the last Place, whose religious Fears arise from accidental Disorders of Mind or Body. This Case is not subject to Reason, and therefore much cannot be said upon it. Whatever the Union of Soul and Body is, so united they are, that the Disorders of one often derive themselves to the other. A melancholy Mind will waste
the

the Strength, and bring Paleness and Leanness upon the Body: Disorders in the Body do often affect the Mind; a Stroke of the Palsy will rob a Man of the Use of his Understanding, and leave him disabled in Mind as well as Body. For this Reason it is that I ascribe some religious Fears to the Disorders of the Body, though they properly belong to the Mind. We call only great Disorders in the Mind Madness; but all Disorders, as far as they extend, are of the same Kind: The melancholy Man, who thinks himself in a State of Damnation, without any Reason, or Power to reason upon his Case, is as certainly in this Point a Madman, as the poor Wretch, whose Disorder has taken another Turn, and makes him believe himself to be a King or an Emperor. There are many Instances of this Kind abroad in the World: The unhappy Sufferers, were they capable of receiving the Advice, should be directed to seek their Cure from Physicians rather than Divines. Were I to give you Instances in what Manner these religious Fears work, what unreasonable Suspensions and Jealousies they create, how full they oftentimes are of Absurdity and manifest Contradiction, it would evidently appear to you, that they are truly Distempers either in the Mind or Body; but this would be but melancholy Entertainment, and of no great Use. Such Persons as these are not chargeable with seeking false Comfort for themselves; for it is Part of their Distemper to refuse all Comfort. The true Comfort we have for them they are unable to receive, That they are not capable of judging of themselves, and that he, to whom Judgment belongeth, will deal with them not according to their Imaginations, but according to the Rules of his own Goodness and Righteousness.

These Terrors cannot be imputed as a Blemish to Religion; not by him at least, who acknowledges the Providence of God, and whose Principle of Religion is Reason: For all Madness is destructive of Reason, as much as these Terrors are of Religion: They are both destructive: They are Evils to which we must submit: And if we cannot account for the Reason of them, it becomes us to be dumb, and not open our Mouths in his Presence, *whose Ways are past finding out.*



DISCOURSE XIV.

PSALM xix. 14.

*Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation
of my Heart, be acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord,
my Strength, and my Redeemer.*

I HAVE made Choice of these Words, with which the Holy Psalmist shuts up this nineteenth Psalm, intending to open to you the Scheme of Thought which runs through the Whole. It contains one of the completest Forms of Devotion, and of the most general Use, of those recorded in his Writings. When his Thoughts turn upon his own Circumstances, which were in all Respects great and uncommon, and such as the Generality of Men can never experience, it is no wonder to find his Prayers and his Songs of Praises conceived in no common Strain. When a King stands before the Altar, we may well expect a royal Sacrifice; such an one as is not expected from a private Hand, nor fit to be offered by it. But here, in the Psalm before you,

the Crown and the Sceptre are laid by, his own Dignity is forgotten, and his whole Mind employed in contemplating the mighty Things of Providence, displayed in the Works of Nature, and of Grace. Exalted Thoughts of God do naturally produce the lowest, which are always the justest, of ourselves. Thus the Royal Psalmist, having warmed his Heart with the Glory of the Almighty, as if he were now in the Posture in which all Kings must one Day appear before their Maker, confesses his own Weakness, and flies to Mercy and Grace for Protection: *Who can understand his Errors? says he, cleanse thou me from my secret Faults. Keep back thy Servant also from presumptuous Sins, let them not have Dominion over me: Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great Transgression.*

The Piety of this Psalm is so natural, and yet so exalted; so easy to be understood, so adapted to move the Affections, that it is hardly possible to read it with any Attention, without feeling something of the same Spirit by which it was indited: *The Heavens, says the Holy King, declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy Work. Day unto Day uttereth Speech, and Night unto Night sheweth Knowledge. There is no Speech nor Language where their Voice is not heard.* He begins with the Works of the Creation, to magnify the Power and Wisdom of the Creator: They are a perpetual Instruction to Mankind, every Day and every Night speak his Goodness, and, by their regular and constant Vicissitude, set forth the Excellency of Wisdom by which they are ordered. This Book of Nature is written in every Language, and lies open to all the World: The Works of the Creation speak in the common Voice of Reason, and want no Interpreter to explain their Meaning; but are to be understood by People of all Languages upon the Face of the Earth:

There

There is no Speech nor Language where their Voice is not heard. From these Works in general he singles out one, to stand as a Testimony of the Power of his Maker: The Sun is the great Spirit of the World, the Life that animates these lower Parts: How constant and unwearied is his Course! How large his Circuit, to impart Life and genial Heat to every dark Corner of the Earth! *He is as a Bridegroom coming out of his Chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong Man to run a Race. His going forth is from the End of the Heaven, and his Circuit unto the Ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the Heat thereof.*

From this mighty Scene and Prospect of Nature the Psalmist turns his Thoughts to the Consideration of the still greater Works of Grace: The rational World, as in itself the noblest, so has it been the more peculiar Care of Providence to preserve and adorn it. The Sun knows its Course, and has always trod the Path marked out by the Creator: The Sea keeps its old Channel, and, in its utmost Fury, remembers the first Law of its Maker, *Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther:* But Freedom and Reason, subject to no such Restraint, have produced infinite Variety in the rational World: Of all the Creatures Man only could forget his Maker and himself, and prostitute the Honour of both, by robbing God of the Obedience due to him, and by submitting himself a Slave to the Elements of the World. When he looked up to the Heavens, and saw the Glory of the Sun and Stars, instead of praising the Lord of all, he foolishly said, *These are thy Gods, O Man!* When Man was thus lost in Ignorance and Superstition, God manifested himself again, gave him a Law to direct his Will and inform his Reason, and to teach him in all Things how to pursue his own Happiness. This was a kind

of second Creation, a Work that calls as much both for our Wonder and our Praise, as any or all the Works of Nature. And thus the Holy Psalmist sings the Triumphs of Grace, and extols the Mercy and Power of God in the restoring Mankind from the Bondage of Ignorance and Idolatry: *The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the Soul: The Testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the Simple: The Statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the Heart: The Commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the Eyes: The Fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: The Judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether: More to be desired are they than Gold, yea than much fine Gold: Sweeter also than Honey and the Honeycomb: Moreover by them is thy Servant warned, and in keeping them there is great Reward.* To these divine Oracles the Sinner owes the Conversion of his Soul: To the Light of God's Word the Simple owes his Wisdom; nay, even the Pleasures of Life, and all the solid Comforts we enjoy, flow from the same living Spring: The Statutes of the Lord do rejoice the Heart, as well as enlighten the Eyes; and not only shew us the Danger and Miseries of Iniquity, and by shewing teach us to avoid them, but do lead us likewise to certain Happiness and Joy for evermore: *For in keeping them there is great Reward.*

But is it possible, whilst thus we praise and adore God for all his Mercies, to forget one great Circumstance, which affects both them and ourselves? I mean, how undeserved they are! It is a Reflection, which, like the Pillar of the Cloud that waited on the *Israelites*, casts Light and Beauty upon the Mercies of God, Darkness and Confusion of Face upon ourselves. Can we help thinking, that, notwithstanding God has thus secured and hedged us about with a Law that is perfect, with Commandments that are pure, with Judgments

that

that are true and righteous altogether; yet still our own Weakness is perpetually betraying us into Error, our Folly or our Wickedness driving us into Sins, more in Number than either we can or care to remember? The Royal Psalmist saw the Justness of this Reflection, and whilst his Heart glowed with the Sense of God's unbounded Mercies, he turned short upon himself with this Complaint, *Who can understand his Errors?*

This Complaint is followed by a fervent Prayer to God for Pardon and Protection: From the Prospect of the Power and Goodness of God, and our own Weakness and Misery, the Soul easily melts into Sorrow and Devotion, lamenting what it feels, and imploring what it wants from the Hand which only is able to save and to redeem: *O cleanse thou me*, says the Royal Penitent, *from secret Faults*. This Petition flowed from an Heart intimately touched with the Sense of its own Unworthiness: Secret he calls his Faults, not with a Design to extenuate his Crimes, or as if he thought the Actions he had now in his View of so doubtful a Nature, that it was not easily to be judged, whether they should be placed among the sinful, or the indifferent Circumstances of his Life; and therefore, if they were Faults, they were secret ones, such as stole from him without the Consent or Approbation of his Mind: But secret he calls them, with respect to their Number; so often he had offended, that his Memory was too frail to keep an exact Register of all his Errors; but though they were secret to him, yet well he knew, that God had placed them in the Light of his Countenance; and therefore, though he could neither number or confess them, he begs that they might not be imputed, or rise up in Judgment against his Soul. This Sense is well expressed in our old

Translation, *Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse thou me from my secret Faults!*

But though our Sins are more in Number than the Hairs of our Head, yet some there are that stand distinguished by an uncommon Guilt, and will always be present to our Minds, whenever we approach the Throne of Grace for Pardon. These we should particularly lament, against these we should particularly pray, when we seek to God for Strength and Assistance. In this Strain the Holy Psalmist continues his Devotion, *Keep back thy Servant also from presumptuous Sins; let them not have Dominion over me: Then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great Transgression.*

Having thus extolled his Maker for the Greatness of his Power and Mercy, and humbled himself for the Number and the Heinousness of his Iniquities, he closes this Scene of Praise and of Devotion in the Language of the Text, *Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be always acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

I have endeavoured to open to you the Scheme of Thought which runs through this excellent Pattern of Prayer and Meditation; hoping by this more effectually to warm your Minds into a Sense of this Duty, and to set before you in a better Light the Beauty both of Praise and Prayer, when duly performed, and accompanied with proper Affections of the Heart, than by any thing I could say to you upon the Subject: It is a Subject indeed that speaks for itself: And a Prayer, or a Song of Praise, composed in the true Spirit of Piety and Devotion, is the greatest Incitement, as well as the best Direction, for the Performance of the respective Duties. A Man's Heart must be as cold as Marble, who can read or hear the Songs of holy Joy

and Rapture, with which the Saints of old gave Praise to their Maker, and not feel some Resentments of the same Spirit of Joy and Gratitude in his Breast; or who can go over a Prayer which expresses the Guilt of Sin, and confesses the Weakness of Nature, and pours forth the Cries of an afflicted Soul for Mercy and Pardon, and not be touched with the Description of Circumstances which are so much his own; or not send forth the Wishes of his own Heart to attend the Cries for Mercy and Pardon, which he so certainly stands in need of obtaining. A Scene of Misery, drawn either by the Poet's or the Painter's Skill, has Force enough to move the Pity of a compassionate Heart; for we are so near allied to the Sufferings of our Fellow-Creatures, by sharing in the same Nature, which as it subjected them, so it exposes us to the Miseries we behold, that we cannot resist the Impressions of Sorrow arising from Circumstances which may any Day happen to be our own: Much less can we stand by, as unconcerned Lookers on, when we behold the Misery of a Soul afflicted for Sin, or when we hear the ardent Prayers which are poured forth in the Presence of God for Pardon and Mercy, or see the Tears which flow from the Pangs of a wounded Spirit; for this Case, this miserable Condition, not only may be, but most certainly is our own: These Tears, these Cries for Mercy, should be ours, since the Cause is ours from whence they proceed; nor can we well help partaking in them, nor be altogether insensible of the Grief of our Fellow-Sufferers.

There is the same Reason for our being affected with the Praises of God, and joining to give Glory to his Name, whenever we read the Songs of Thanksgiving recorded in Scripture, as Instances of the Tribute which God expects, and which the Saints are

used to pay; for his Mercies are dispensed with an equal Hand, he maketh the Sun to rise upon the Just and the Unjust; and when we share the Blessings, and partake in the same Mercies, how can we refuse to bear our Part in offering up the Incense of Praise; or how resist the Motions of Gratitude, which arise from the Sense of those Enjoyments which are the Gift of Heaven? This Psalm of *David*, in how exalted a Strain is it penned; how nobly is the Song raised from Circumstances which at once set forth in equal Beauty the Majesty and the Mercy of the Almighty? and yet there is not one Act of Providence mentioned, one Instance of Grace recorded, that you do not as largely reap the Benefit of, and are as much in Duty and Gratitude bound to be thankful for, as even *David* himself. Nay, the Advantage is certainly on your Side in this Respect: The Heavens indeed are the same they were in *David's* time; and Day and Night, constant to their Maker's Law, have walked the same unwearied Round: The Sun shines out with the same Beauty and Light to animate and refresh the World: The material Sun I mean: For since *David's* time the Sun of Righteousness himself has arose in our Firmament, and shed forth the choicest Blessings of Heaven upon the Inhabitants of the Earth: The Glories of the Messiah's Reign, and the Happiness of his Days, were Prospects, which at a Distance, and but darkly seen, could fill the Mouths of the Saints and Prophets with the Praises of the Lord! And can we be silent, who enjoy the Fulness of those Mercies, to whom the Saviour of the World has opened the richest Treasures of God's Bounty and Goodness? Lock back and see with what Pleasure and Rapture the Holy Psalmist speaks of the Laws and Judgments of God; *more desirable they were to him than the finest Gold;*

Gold; sweeter than the Honey and the Honeycomb: And yet he lived under the *Mosaic* Law, a Yoke hard to be borne. Had he seen the Days of the Gospel, and tasted the Righteousness of this new Law, I am at a Loss even to imagine, in what Strains of holy Eloquence his Joy would have flowed. When he applies to God for Pardon and Forgiveness for past Offences, for Strength and Assistance to preserve him for the future, with what a noble Resignation of Soul, and sure Trust in God, does he discharge this Part of his Devotion! And yet he had not all the Encouragements for this Duty which we enjoy: He had never heard the Melody of that heavenly Voice which daily calls us to Repentance, *Come unto me all ye that travel and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you:* Nor had he received those express Promises of Grace and spiritual Assistance, which have since been confirmed to us by the Blood of the New Covenant. To return therefore to the Thought which made Way for these Reflections: We have all imaginable Reason to join with all our Hearts, and all our Minds, in these exalted Forms of Prayer and Praise: We on whom the Blessings of Heaven have been doubled, who have been made the Children of God by the Spirit of Adoption, who have had the Charter of God's Pardon granted to us by his blessed Son, and have received the Promises of a Kingdom, which shall remain as long as Time endureth. As our Theme has been thus exalted, so should our Praises be likewise; so should the Affections of our Souls be raised to acknowledge and adore the Giver of these good and perfect Gifts. We need not fear being too lavish upon this Occasion: Let the Tide of Joy run ever so high, it cannot swell beyond the Dignity of the Subject: Our Praises are but a poor Tribute for what we have received; our Prayers a Price

of no Value for what we ask: And even those too have their Imperfections, when performed in the best Manner; that were we not in the Hands of a merciful God, who is not extreme to mark what is done amiss, we should not dare to open our Mouths before him, either in Prayer or in Praise. And this Reflection seems to have led the Holy Psalmist to that Petition which is contained in the Words read to you for the Text, and with which this excellent Composure is closed up, *Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be always acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

If we consider these Words with a Retrospect upon what went before, and suppose the Holy Psalmist here to reflect upon what he had been doing, the Meaning of them then must be that which I have suggested: He had been praising God for all his Goodness to the Children of Men; had been by fervent Prayer imploring his Protection against the Snares and Allurements of Sin: But what were his Prayers or his Praises to God? or what valuable Sacrifice could Dust and Ashes offer up to the Almighty? Struck with this just Sense of Humility, he stirs not from the Place or Subject of his Devotion, till he had first begged Pardon for the Lameness of his Sacrifice, for the Imperfections even of his Prayers and Praises, and implored God's Acceptance of the poor Tribute he was able to pay him. He knew how imperfect the best of his Actions were; how unworthy his Praises were of God; and how dangerous a Subject Prayer is, *since we know not what we should pray for as we ought.* Prayer, if not directed by the Spirit, will be influenced by the Passions, and taught the unworthy Language of Self-Love: Far therefore from being exalted with his Performance, the Saint retires excusing his Devotion, and begging.

begging one farther Mercy of God, That he would accept the Service he was able to offer. An Example worthy of our Imitation! and which yet we are hardly worthy enough to imitate. For if we consider with what Coldness we pass through our Prayers and Praises, with what Inattention we are present at the Service of God, how our Thoughts wander, and our Hearts are surprized into the Pursuit of vain and idle Concoits, or are possessed with worldly Thoughts and Care, we must needs think it an Act of the highest Presumption to desire God to receive such Devotion, or to accept the Meditation of such idle roving Hearts. This was not the Psalmist's Case: When he began the Praises of God, he launched out into his Course with the Life and Vigour of the Sun, which he describes, *like a Bridegroom coming out of his Chamber, and rejoicing as a strong Man to run his Race*: When his Subject naturally changed upon his Hand, and Prayer took Place of Praise, his Mind followed his Subject, and the Petitions themselves shew with what Zeal and Fervour of Spirit they were offered up. And if such Devotion as this was to beg Admittance to the Presence of God, and not to appear without an Excuse, what must become of ours? since, without injuring our own Merit, many of us have Reason to say when we leave the Church, Lord, lay not this Sin to our Charge! For surely to approach the Throne of God with Indevotion, with Hearts not disposed to Seriousness, to sit out the Prayers of the Church as if something were doing in which we have no Concern, is one of those Offences which are noted down in the Book, and for which God will call the Sons of Men into Judgment.

But secondly, The Words of the Text are capable of a more enlarged Sense: The Psalmist had begged
for

for Mercy for his secret Faults; had implored the Assistance of God to preserve him from presumptuous Sin; and if you continue the Thought to the Words of the Text, in them he beseeches God to take under his Direction likewise the Words of his Mouth, and the Thoughts of his Heart, that he might be continued innocent and blameless in Thought, Word, and Deed. This Sense expresses the greatest Regard to Virtue and Innocence, and the fullest Dependence upon the Grace and Protection of God: He knew that God not only saw all his Actions, his open and notorious Sins, but that he spied out all his Ways, and knew his Thoughts long before; and that it was in vain for him to wash his Hands in Innocence, unless he purged his Heart likewise from all Filthiness of Spirit: To him therefore he applies, that he would guard the Passages of his Heart, and set a Watch upon the Door of his Lips, that nothing unclean might enter into one, or proceed out of the other. Our Lord has told us, *That for every idle Word Men shall give an Account in the Day of Judgment*: And his Apostle St. Paul has taught us, *That there will be a Day in which God will judge the Secrets of all Men by Christ Jesus*: Which are sufficient Cautions to us to be watchful over our Tongues and our Hearts, that they rob us not of the Fruit of all our Labour and Hope. Unchaste Thoughts, and loose Desires, are the Beginning of lewd and impure Actions; and if they are generated and conceived in the Heart, that fruitful Womb of Iniquity, they will soon be born into the World, and grow up to the full Stature of Sin. To secure the Heart is therefore the Ground-work of Virtue: It is almost the one Thing necessary, since without it no other Care can be effectual: It is that only which can render our Praises or Prayers acceptable to God, and give us Courage to offer

DISCOURSE XIV. 233

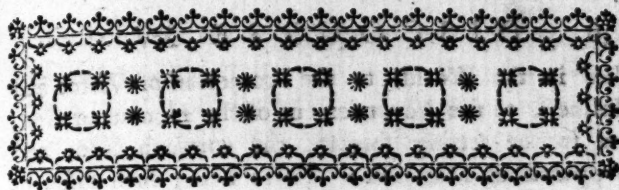
offer up our imperfect Devotions before his Throne. The best of Men have their Failings, and an honest Christian may be a weak one; but weak as he may be, the Goodness and Sincerity of his Heart will intitle him to put up the Petition of the Text, which no Hypocrite or cunning Deceiver can ever make use of, *Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength, and my Redeemer.*





DISCOURSE XV.

THE FATHER OF THE FATHERS, who is the
author of all grace, and the fountain of all
mercy, has been pleased to bestow upon
this people, a most precious and valuable
gift, which is the gift of his Holy Spirit.
This gift is the source of all our graces,
and the foundation of all our hopes. It is
the power of God, which is given to us
to enable us to overcome all our enemies,
and to live in the love of God and our
neighbour. This gift is the power of
sanctification, which is the power of
God, which is given to us to enable us
to live in the love of God and our
neighbour. This gift is the power of
sanctification, which is the power of
God, which is given to us to enable us
to live in the love of God and our
neighbour.



DISCOURSE XV.



LUKE xii. 21.

*So is he that layeth up Treasure for himself, and is
not rich towards God.*

 HE Riches of the World being often the Fruits of Injustice and Oppression, one wealthy Man's Estate being raised perhaps upon the Ruin and Poverty of hundreds, and built upon the Tears and Cries of Widows and Orphans; and yet being sometimes represented in Scripture as the Blessing of God upon the honest Labour and Industry of Men diligent in their Calling or Profession; or as the Reward bestowed upon a virtuous Contentment, and Resignation of Mind to the Providence of the Almighty: A great Fortune being often used to very ill Purposes, to the Increase of Luxury and Wantonness, to the Encouragement of Vice, and to the Mischief of all who are the unhappy Neighbours of an over-grown rich Man; and yet being in itself applicable to the best
Uses

Uses in the World, to the Promotion of Virtue and Holiness, to the Advancement of the Honour of God, and to the setting forward the common Good and Happiness of Mankind: There being such different Ways both of getting and enjoying the Riches of the World, the Possession of them has been either valued or despised, condemned or approved by Moralists and Divines, according to the View they have had of them with relation to the several Methods by which they are obtained and employed. *The Hand of the Diligent, saith Solomon, maketh rich: And again, The Blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and he addeth no Sorrow with it; yet at other Times he observed Riches that had no Blessing in them, There is a sore Evil which I have seen under the Sun, namely, Riches kept for the Owners thereof to their Hurt.*

From this Observation I think all Disputes about Riches may be reconciled: Where they are ill got, or ill used, they are an Hurt to the Owner; where they are honestly got, and worthily enjoyed, they are a Blessing to the Owner, and through his Means to many others. Thus far the Case is plain: But then it is a Matter of farther Consideration, to see what the Iniquity is that generally follows a large Possession. The rich Man's Crimes are commonly considered under the Head of Profuseness or Covetousness: To the first are referred Luxury, Intemperance, and all the Sins of Pleasure which Wealth furnishes and supports: To the second Head are reduced Fraud, Oppression, Want of Kindness and Charity, and all the Iniquity that attends the unreasonable Desire of getting or preserving an Estate. All these indeed are very great and too common Faults among rich Men: But there is still a more secret Iniquity that sticks close to great Possessions, and which does not always discover itself

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in the ill Effects before-mentioned : A Man may have an Estate honestly gotten, and in the Eye of the World he may use it in all Respects as he ought, and yet still be a very wicked rich Man. What, you will say, although he be free from Covetousness, given to Hospitality, and liberal to the Poor? if these Things will not preserve Riches from the Contagion of Guilt, what will? But before you judge too hastily in this Cause, you must consider that Virtue does not consist merely in the outward Act; it is not the material Action that denominates a Man good or bad, but the Judgment in this Case must regard the Principle from whence the Actions flow. A prodigal Man squanders his Money without Regard or Distinction of Persons or Occasions: Where Tenderness and Good-nature attend upon this Vice, the Poor and Miserable often gather largely of the prodigal Man's Scatterings: But will you call this Christian Charity, where perhaps the Duty owing to God was never once thought on, and of all that was given, not one Farthing offered as Tribute to the great Giver of every good Gift; but the Fountain-head was corrupt, though the Stream indeed flowed in no ill Channel?

If we consider the Parable of the rich Man, of which the Words of the Text are the Moral or Application, we shall discover what particular Evil in Riches our Saviour pointed at, and designed to correct by the Instruction of this Parable. The Story is this: *The Ground of a certain rich Man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my Fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my Barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my Fruits and my Goods. And I will say unto my Soul, Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years; take thine Ease,*

Ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou Fool, this Night thy Soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those Things be which thou hast provided? After which follow the Words of the Text, *So is he that layeth up Treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.*

The first Thing to be inquired into is the true Drift and Meaning of this Parable: In the fifteenth Verse of this Chapter our Lord warns his Hearers *to beware of Covetousness*: In this Parable he represents the foolish rich Man enlarging his Barns, that he might heap up his Goods in Store: In the Text he warns us of the Danger of laying up Treasures for ourselves, whilst we neglect being rich towards God: And in the thirty-third Verse he exhorts us *to sell that we have, and give Alms; to provide for ourselves Bags which wax not old, a Treasure in the Heavens that faileth not, where no Thief approacheth, neither Moth corrupteth*. From these Circumstances it is commonly understood, that Covetousness was the rich Man's Crime; that enlarging his Barns to receive his plentiful Crop was the Instance and Proof of it; and that the only Way to be rich towards God is to sell our Goods, and to distribute them in Works of Charity and Mercy. Thus this Parable is commonly understood, but I think not rightly. Our Saviour, it is true, introduces this Parable in Consequence of the Caution he had given against Covetousness: But he had before given a Reason against Covetousness, *For a Man's Life*, says he, *consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth*: And the Parable was added to illustrate this Reason given against Covetousness, and not to display the Folly or Vice of Covetousness in general. The rich Man is not described in the Colours of a covetous Man: His Wealth arose from no Oppression

or Usury ; it was the Product of his own Land, which has always been esteemed as honest a Way of being rich, and to proceed as much from the immediate Blessing of God, as any whatever : The Ground was his own ; he is not said to withhold from the rightful Possessor by Violence or by Fraud. Thus far then there is no Mark of Covetousness, or of any other Fault. But, when he found his Crop to be great, he enlarged his Barns ; and this perhaps was his Crime. But where was the Iniquity of this ? Does not every Man endeavour that his Barns should be in Proportion to the Product of his Land ? May not the most charitable Man in the World have a Barn, or build a Barn, large enough to receive his Crop, and yet be guiltless ? Nay, it is evident from hence, that Covetousness, properly so called, was not his Fault ; for he built his Barn to lay up Stores for many Years, proposing Rest and Satisfaction in the Goods already gotten, and intending to trouble himself no farther about Wealth ; he had enough. A covetous Man would rather have turned his Goods into Money, and put it to Usury, and slaved on still for more. Besides, in the twentieth Verse, where God is brought in reproving the rich Man for his Folly, there is not one Word said of his building large Barns to receive his Fruits : *Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee.* But, if the large Barn had been the Crime, the Consistency of the Parable requires, that the Reproof should have pointed to the Crime, and it should have been said, *Thou Fool, this Night shall the Lightning from Heaven consume thy large Barns, or something to this Purpose.* Farther, Neither upon this is it rightly concluded from the Circumstances of the Parable, that this rich Man was void of Charity to the Poor : He is represented as fully satisfied in his Abundance :

Abundance: There had been much more Reason to have thought him uncharitable, had he been represented as not contented with his Abundance, but still fearful of Poverty and Want; which is often the Case, and the Pretence of the rich uncharitable Man. Nor, lastly, is it reasonable to limit and confine the Notion of being rich towards God to Works of Charity only; all good Works in proportion make us rich towards God. St. *Paul* speaks in general of the Richness of good Works, and St. *James* of the Richness of Faith: And in the Text, to be rich to God does particularly signify, to trust and rely upon his Providence for our Life and Support, in Opposition to relying on Treasures of our own heaping up, or large Barns of our own building and filling; as I shall shew presently.

Having thus far examined the common Interpretation of the Parable, and shewn how much short it falls of our Saviour's true Aim and Intent, I shall now endeavour to point out the true Meaning of it, which will lead us into the right Sense and Understanding of the Text.

When our Saviour exhorted his Hearers to beware of Covetousness, he supported his Advice with this Reason, *For a Man's Life consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth*; This Reason he illustrates and confirms in the following Parable. The Aim then of the Parable is to shew, that Wealth is no Security, that it is Folly to pretend to arm ourselves against the Accidents or Casualties of Life by heaping up Treasures, which nothing can protect us against but the good Providence and Care of our heavenly Father. In this Point all the Circumstances of the Parable meet: The rich Man is represented as flowing in Plenty, so that he was necessitated to pull down his Barns and Store-houses

houses in order to enlarge them : This Plenty made him forget God, and vainly imagine that he had a Security in his own Hands against all the Calamities of Life : His Riches made him promise himself many happy Days and Years : In which Confidence he thus expresses himself, *Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years ; take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry.* This Folly God reproves him for, and checks him in his presumptuous Security, *Thou Fool, this Night thy Soul shall be required of thee ; then whose shall those Things be which thou hast provided ?* Thou shalt die, and what then must become of those mighty Pledges of thy Security ? So little will they avail thee, that they themselves will fall under the Power of another, never to return to thee again. *So is he, says our Lord, who lays up Treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.* These Words, being the Moral of this Parable, must be expounded so as to answer the Design of the Parable ; and therefore to lay up Treasures for ourselves, must signify to lay up Treasures for our own Security, as if we meant to become thereby the Carvers of our own Fortune ; consequently, to be rich towards God, being placed in Opposition to laying up Treasures for ourselves, must denote our placing our Confidence and Trust in him, our endeavouring to procure his Favour and Protection, as knowing that in them only is all our Hope and Stability.

From this Representation it is easily collected what is the dangerous Circumstance attending Riches, which makes them often prove so fatal to their Owners ; namely, That they beget an irreligious Confidence and Presumption in the Heart of Man, inclining him to forget God who formed him. A Sense and Feeling of Want is a constant Remembrance of our Dependence, and is ever calling upon us to look up to

Him, upon whose Mercy and Goodness we exist. A Life spent in these Difficulties, and supported beyond all the reasonable Hopes of narrow Circumstances, suggests to us every Moment how wonderfully God has brought us on our Way, when we had neither Staff nor Shoes nor Money in our Scrip: These are the natural Thoughts and Suggestions of Poverty. But a Man who lives in the midst of Plenty, and fears no Want, is not apt to think often of the Need he has to be assisted: He that remembers nothing, but that his large Estate has ever supplied both his Necessities and Superfluities, will hardly reflect farther, so as to come to an Acknowledgment that God has been his Stay ever since he fell from his Mother's Womb. This is the common Case of Riches; they steal the Heart from God, and render it insensible to the Duties of Religion, by taking away the Foundation of all Religion, the Sense of our Dependence on the Providence and Care of Heaven. This made our Lord cry out, *How hardly shall a rich Man enter into the Kingdom of Heaven!* This Insolence, this Pride of Mind, which is the proper Growth of the rich Man's Soil, chokes all the Seeds of Virtue and Holiness, and leaves no room for the Plants planted by our heavenly Father to thrive and prosper: Even Charity itself, the choicest Flower of a rich Garden, flies the Neighbourhood of this poisonous Weed, and will not take Root by it.

It is this Irreligioufness of Mind, this Disregard to God and every thing that is good, which are the too common Companions of a plentiful Fortune, that have made Riches to be so hardly spoken of in Scripture: If you examine particular Places, you will find Regard is still had to this Corruption of Mind. In the Parable of the rich Man and *Lazarus* it is not easy to find upon what Account the rich Man was condemned, as the

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Cafe is generally supposed to be stated: The rich Man is said to be *cloathed in Purple and fine Linen, and to fare sumptuously every Day*: He was not covetous, it seems; he lived answerably to his Fortune: His Life is represented as a Scene of Ease and Pleasure, but is not taxed with any notable Vice or Enormity: He is said to fare sumptuously, which I take to be a Description of his State and Grandeur, rather than an Imputation of any Vice; for he is not accused either of Gluttony or Drunkenness. But was he not, you will say, uncharitable? for poor *Lazarus* lay at his Door, *desiring the Crumbs that fell from his Table*. This Circumstance rather shews, that the Poor used to be fed at his Door. Had the Intent of the Parable been to have represented this rich Man as hard to the Poor, it would have been said, that his Servant drove away the Poor from the Door; or at least, when the Poor came, that they were sent empty away: Neither of which is said; but *Lazarus* is represented as feeding upon the Crumbs of the rich Man's Table. And this is the Image given us of their different Conditions in this World: The rich Man sate down to a sumptuous Table; the poor Man was glad to feed upon the Crumbs and Scraps that fell from it. The End of these Men is well known: *Lazarus* was carried by Angels into *Abraham's Bosom*; the rich Man was tormented in Hell Flames. What then does the Parable teach us? Why it represents to us the dangerous State of great Men, who live without the Fear or Love of God in their Hearts; and the much happier Condition of the Poor, who have their Share of Misery in this World, which often leads to Glory and Immortality hereafter. If you look forward, you will see this is the true Aim of the Parable: When

the rich Man applies to *Abraham* for Relief, and finds none; he then petitions for his Brethren, that they might be warned against the Danger that hung over their Heads, against coming into the same sad State with himself. Here you may well imagine that he would desire they should be particularly warned against those Crimes which had proved his Ruin. Had he burnt in the Flames for Intemperance or Uncharitableness, he would have begged that his Brethren might have been exhorted to fly the Sins that were his Tormentors. But of this nothing is said: He only desires that *Lazarus* might go in Quality of a Prophet to testify the Truth and Reality of a future State: Which plainly shews, that his Condemnation was the Effect of Irreligion and Unbelief: He lived at Ease, and God was not in all his Thoughts. To his Request *Abraham* replies, *They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them*: Shewing us again, that the Fault of these rich Men was Contempt of the Prophets and Irreligion. The rich Man tacitly owns this Contempt, both for himself and his Brethren, by saying, *Nay, but if one went from the Dead, they will repent*: Which was confessing that they had not Reverence enough for *Moses* and the Prophets, to repent upon their Authority and Admonition, but wanted some greater Motive, which he thought might be found in the Appearance of one coming from the Grave. From these Circumstances it is evident, that the Purport of the Parable is not to represent to us the Heinousness of any one particular Crime for which the rich Man suffered; but to shew how fatally Riches influence the Mind to Irreligion, and make Men forget God; whilst the Poor, living in continual Want, have a perpetual Sense of their

their Dependence, and do in all their Distress look up to Him of whom cometh their Salvation. This Sense of Dependence creates in the poor Man a Fear to offend, a Desire to please; whilst the rich Man, wanting, as he thinks, nothing from God, has no Desire to court his Favour; but grows negligent and remiss in all the Parts of Religion, from which it is a very easy Step to Infidelity.

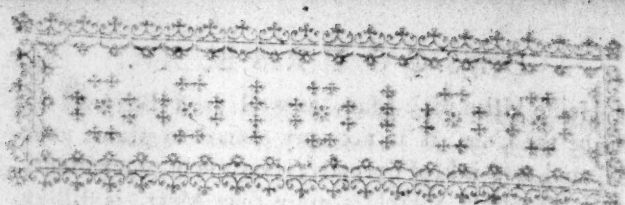
It is from these Considerations that the *Love of the World* is said in Scripture to be *Enmity with God*. All Vices are not attended with Hatred and Contempt of God; not all the Vices that are commonly ascribed to Riches: And therefore the *Love of the World*, that is *Enmity with God*, is not to be expounded by Covetousness or Uncharitableness, or any other particular Vice; but denotes the rich Man's Temper and Disposition, the Habit of Mind that grows out of a plentiful Estate: And this indeed is very commonly *Enmity with God*, inclining Men not only to disobey his Commands, but, as far as lies in them, to throw him out of the World, and depose him from the Throne of Heaven.

To the same Purpose our Lord speaks, when he tells us, *No Man can serve two Masters: For either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other: Ye cannot serve God and Mammon*. Here our Lord speaks without a Parable, and tells us plainly what it is that makes Wealth to be so dangerous a Possession; namely, because it is the Rival of God: And if it once get Possession of the Mind, it will expel all Trust and Confidence in God, all Regard to Faith and Religion: *For ye cannot serve God and Mammon*.

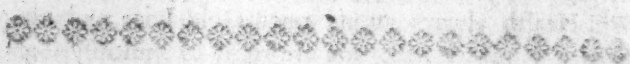
From what has been discoursed upon this Subject, we may learn, where a rich Man ought to place his

Guard: If he is not covetous or uncharitable, if he is not luxurious and intemperate, so far it is well: But above all, let him take heed, that the Pride and Insolence of Mind, too common in plentiful Circumstances, grow not upon him; the Pride, I mean, of Self-sufficiency, as if he were able to guide and to guard himself through the World, and had not so much Need of the Care of God over him, as the Poor who enjoy nothing: Let him learn to know, that in Riches is no Security, and that he wants the Protection of Heaven as much as the poorest Wretch in the World. A rich Man, that has this Sense as he ought to have, will in consequence have the other Virtues proper to his State: He will be gentle, affable, kind, and charitable; and his Spirit, in the Height of Fortune, will be adorned with the Meekness of the Gospel of Christ. A Man of Sense need not go far to learn this Submission to God in the highest Fortune: Our Saviour's Argument, that follows close after the Text, will teach him the Reasonableness of the Duty: *The Life, says he, is more than Meat, and the Body is more than Raiment.* The utmost Riches can do, upon the largest Concessions made to them, is to provide Food and Raiment, and such-like Necessaries and Conveniencies of Life. Put the Case then, That, by being Master of a great Estate, you are Master of Food and Raiment, and can have them in what Quantity or Quality you please: What then? Have you less Reason, upon this Account, to depend upon God, and to implore his Aid? Consider a little: To what Purpose serves Food? Is it not for the Support of Life? But can Food ward off Death? Are you, in all your Plenty of Provisions, one Jot securer against Sicknes, or any Accident that may rob you of your Life, than the poorest Man? Will not a Tile from

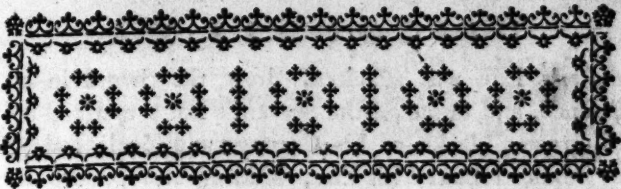
an House kill a rich Man, as well as a Beggar? If this be the Case, is it not very absurd to plume yourself, and to think of Security, because of your Plenty, when Life itself, which is more than Meat, is still exposed, and for which you can have no Security, but in the Goodness of God? You have many Changes of Raiment, and the Poor has only Rags. What then? Will the Gout or Stone or burning Fever pay such Respect to fine Clothes, as not to approach them? Will Health always attend upon Gold Lace and Embroidery? If it will, you are right to multiply Garments: But if, after all your Care for Raiment, you must still depend upon God, as well as the Beggar, for Health and Strength of Body, how ridiculous is the Joy over many Changes of Garments! *Is not the Body more than Raiment?* Since then you must trust God for your Life and Strength, because they are Things which no Care of your own, no Degree of Wealth can insure; had you not even as good trust him a little farther, and ease yourself of this unreasonable Care for the Things of Life? From these and the like Considerations you may see, that Dependence upon God is as much the rich Man's Duty and Interest, as it is the poor Man's; that to trust God, and to rely on his Goodness, is to be rich towards God, and is that Sort of Riches which will make us easy and happy in this Life, and glorious and ever-blessed in that which is to come. By these Means we may still enjoy our Fortunes; and, as our Church has taught us to pray, "We may so pass through Things temporal, that we finally lose not the Things eternal."



DISCOURSE XVI.



THE Fall of Man, which was the very first
and holy Instance of human Iniquity, did
it not likewise for before us a signal Exam-
ple of the Divine Mercy, and of the Power
of Grace triumphing over the Weakness of Nature.
For Adam to have had the greatest Share of sin-
ful Courage and Resolution of any of his Disciples,
and the fullest Possession of Faith. He it was who
made the first Confession, and said, When was Created
the first Man, by which he obtained the Pro-
mise of the Lord, I will give unto thee the Key of the
Kingdom of Heaven. He it was who, when he
was crucified, said, My Father, forgive them, for they know
not what they do.

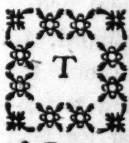


DISCOURSE XVI.



LUKE xxii. 61, 62.

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter; and Peter remembered the Word of the Lord, how he said unto him, Before the Cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.

 HE Fall of *St. Peter* would be a very melancholy Instance of human Infirmary, did it not likewise set before us a signal Example of the divine Mercy, and of the Power of Grace triumphing over the Weakness of Nature. *St. Peter* seems to have had the greatest Share of natural Courage and Resolution of any of the Disciples, and the fullest Persuasion of Faith. He it was who made the first Confession, and said, *Thou art Christ the Son of the living God*; by which he obtained the Promise of his Lord, *I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven*. He it was, who, when his

Master's Life was assaulted, drew the Sword in his Defence, and smote off the Servant's Ear; and had left still greater Marks of his Courage and Zeal, had not his Master rebuked his Fire, bidding him put up the Sword into its Place again. When our Lord foretold the Flight of his Disciples, and that all should be offended because of him, the rest by Silence confessed their Fear and their Shame; *Peter* only stood forth, and, with a Courage seeming to be superior to all Trials, professed, *Though all Men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.* His Lord again declared unto him, *Verily I say unto thee, that this Night, before the Cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice:* But *Peter*, whose Heart was conscious of no Fear, answers boldly, *Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

As the Time of our Lord's Sufferings drew near, he retired to Prayer, and made choice of *Peter* and others to join with him. But here, oppressed with Sleep, they forgot themselves and their Master: But soon they were awakened with the Noise of those who came to apprehend them, and with the Sight of Swords and Staves. *Peter* stood to his Defence; and had it been a Cause proper for the Decision of the Sword, he had at least died with Glory; but he mistook the Weapons of his Warfare, and knew better how to venture his Life in the Field, than to resign it at the Call of Conscience: An evident Sign that natural Courage is not the true Source of Confidence in spiritual Trials, in which they only can conquer, whose Strength is not of Man, but of God. No sooner were the Hopes of Defence taken away, and the Succours which natural Courage affordeth rendered useless, but *Peter's* Resolution began to fail: He could not indeed totally forget his Love to his Master, and therefore he followed him

to his Trial; but he followed him, as the Text expresses it, *afar off*, and mingled himself in the Croud of Servants who attended the Chief-Priests and Elders, hoping by that Artifice to pass unsuspected of any Acquaintance or Familiarity with the Person accused. But whether his Fear discovered him, which even by the Concern it sheweth to lie concealed often betrayeth itself, or however else it happened, he was challenged by a Damsel, who told him, *Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee*: Peter denies it, and, being again suspected, affirms with an Oath, *I know not the Man*. A third Time he is questioned, and then, to shew his Innocence by his Resentment of their Suspensions, he *began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the Man*. And now it was that the Cock crew, and the Lord turned and looked upon Peter; with a Look, however, full of Tenderness and Compassion, that struck Peter to the Heart, and brought to his Mind his Presumption and his Baseness: Under this Confusion he retires from the Presence of his Master, and from the Eyes of the World; and, when he thought of himself and of his Lord, *he wept bitterly*.

Happy Tears! and blessed were the Fruits that followed them! Not long after this the Scene changes again: St. Peter stands in the Place of his Master, before the Tribunal of the High-Priest, summoned to appear for his Doctrine at the Peril of his Life: And now he who denied Christ when he was questioned by a Maid-Servant, boldly preaches him before the High-Priest and Elders, testifying, *that God had raised up Jesus whom they slew, and hanged on a Tree, and had exalted him with his right Hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give Repentance to Israel and Forgiveness of Sins*. And when he had been beaten, and let go, he departed, rejoicing that he had been counted

worthy to suffer Shame for the Name of Christ: And thus he continued constant in Faith under all Trials and Afflictions, and at last laid down his Life for his Master, with whom he now reigns in Glory, distinguished with the brightest Crown of Martyrdom.

This Example of *St. Peter* affords us many useful Reflections, and many excellent Instructions for our Conduct and Behaviour in the Course of our Lives here; some of which I beg leave to suggest to you. And,

First, Hence we may learn that Confidence and Presumption are very unpromising Signs of Stedfastness and Perseverance in Religion. Trust in God is one Thing, and Trust in ourselves is another; and there is Reason to think that they will differ as much in the Success that attends them, as they do in the Powers upon which they are founded.

There is a Boldness and Intrepidity natural to the Temper of some Men, which makes them easily undertake, and often atchieve, great Things; which gives them such Assurance and Reliance on themselves, that they overlook the Dangers and Difficulties at which others stand amazed, and at the Sight of which they find all their Powers forsake them. But then great Spirits are generally attended with great Passions, which by turns usurp the Dominion, and leave little Room for Thought or Reflection; so that a cool Head and a warm Heart seems to be one of the rarest Compositions in Nature. How applicable such Tempers are to Religion, may be known by considering, that the first Principles of true Religion are a Fear of God and a Mistrust of ourselves, which will not easily insinuate into a Mind that fears nothing, and is full of Self-sufficiency. Hence it is, that some fierce Spirits set up
for

for Despisers of Religion, as if even to fear God were too mean a Condescension in a Man of Courage.

But were such Men once entered into the Ways of Holiness, it may be thought perhaps that the same Warmth, which presses them on to great Attempts, would soon make them eminently virtuous; since Courage and Resolution are the likeliest Means to carry us to the greatest Heights in Religion. Such indeed are Christian Courage and Resolution, which arise from a sure Trust in God, and a perfect Submission to his Will, which enable us not only to act with Zeal, but to bear the Disappointments we meet with an unshaken Firmness of Mind. But when Men set out upon their own Bottom, they will soon be offended, and turn back: Glory and Success are the proper Incitement of human Courage; Reproach and Afflictions the necessary Exercise of Christian Fortitude. When *St. Peter* was surrounded with Swords and Staves, he was nothing dismayed, his Heart and his Hand went together in the Cause of God. But yet he, who could fight for his Religion, could not suffer for it. This shews that the Courage of a Christian is very different from that of the natural Man; that it arises from other Considerations, and is supported by other Hopes and Expectations: And it is in vain for you to promise yourselves a Superiority under Trials and Temptations, unless you lay the right Foundation, by imploring the Aid and Assistance of God's Holy Spirit, whose Province only it is to confirm the Faithful to the End.

Secondly, From this Example of *St. Peter* we may learn also what little Reason there is to promise ourselves Success against Temptations which are of our own seeking. *St. Peter* had Warning given him, and was told by One whose Word he might have taken, that he was not able to undergo the Trial, which he
seemed

seemed so much to despise. But try he would, and learnt to know his own Weakness in his Miscarriage.

God knows our Strength better than we ourselves do; and therefore, when he has warned us to avoid the Occasions of Sin, and to fly from the Presence of the Enemy, it is Presumption to think ourselves able to stand the Attack, and our Preparations to meet the Danger must be vain and ineffectual. When we strive not lawfully, even Victory is dishonourable, and no Success can justify Disobedience to Orders: And, where our Strength is not our own, but is derived to us from the great Captain of our Salvation, it is impossible we should prosper, whilst we disobey his Authority, unless we can suppose that he will enable us to act in Contempt of his Commands. When therefore we court the Dangers and Temptations which the Spirit of God has warned us to flee from, we fight without Commission, we are no longer the Soldiers of Christ, or have any Pretence to expect Support from him in our Undertakings. The Promise of the Spirit was given to comfort us in doing the Work of God; and his Assistance is granted to enable us to perform it. And whilst we are doing the Work of our Father, we have no Reason to doubt of proper Encouragement; but when we step out of the Road of our Duty, and form to ourselves Designs not authorized by the Word of God, what Ground have we to look for the Aid of God's Spirit? which Aid is no-where promised to enable us to effect whatever our own Hearts prompt us to undertake, but only to encourage our Obedience to the Laws and Precepts of the Gospel. When God warns us to flee from Temptations, it is sufficient Evidence to us that we are not able to encounter them, and a clear Intimation of his Will that he intends to assist us by his Grace, not to meet them, but to avoid

avoid them; which of itself is a Task difficult enough to exercise the Courage and Constancy of a Christian. When you endeavour to avoid what God has commanded to be avoided, you act under the Assurance and Protection of his Grace; but, if you face about and dare the Temptation, your Courage grows to be Contumacy and Disobedience, and you have no Title to the Promises of the Gospel. An Imagination that we are above all Temptations, and may safely venture into their Company, is always a dangerous Symptom, and shews that spiritual Pride and Presumption have got the upper Hand of Christian Courage and Humility. Men are apt to think that Caution and Fear are only necessary for young Beginners; but that established Virtue is licensed to take a nearer View of Sin, and may enter its Quarters without any Danger from the Infection: But whence arises this Confidence? If from themselves, it is vain; if from a Dependence upon the experienced Strength of God's Grace, the Conclusion is no-where warranted by Scripture, and is a direct Contradiction to St. Paul's Inference drawn from the same Principles, who thus admonishes all Christians; *Work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.* Our whole Ability depending upon the Aid of God's Spirit is, in the Apostle's Way of Reasoning, an Argument for Fear and Trembling: And, if he had the Spirit of God, what Spirit must they have, who, in Contempt of this Apostolical Rebuke to Presumption, thus exhort themselves and others, *Be bold and fear not, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do?* St. Paul did not speak to Babes in Christ Jesus only, but to those also who had attained to the Fulness of Stature in Christ. The best Thing the most confirmed Christian can say for himself, is, *That God worketh*

in him both to will and to do; and if even this be a Reason for Fear and Trembling, if this, which is your Strength, is likewise your Admonition to be cautious and wary, whence can Presumption grow? For, if the Sense of your Strength in Christ Jesus must teach you to be modest and humble, and always upon your Guard, what else is there that can encourage you to be bold and confident? Let no Man therefore think that his Trial is over, or that he is got beyond the Power of Sin and Temptation: The Enemy will watch all your unguarded Moments, and your Security and Presumption will be his Encouragement to attempt your Ruin: *Watch therefore and pray, that ye enter not into Temptation.* And if the Will of God be that your Virtue should be brought to the Trial, if he calls you to the Combat, look up to him for Aid, imploring of his Goodness, *that he would with the Temptation also make a Way for you to escape.*

Thirdly, From the Example of St. *Peter* we may learn how great the Advantages of regular and habitual Holiness are. Good Christians tho' they may fall like other Men through Passion, or Presumption, or other Infirmities, yet the Way to their Repentance is more open and easy; their Minds, not being hardened by Sin, are awakened by the gentlest Calls, and the Sense of Virtue revives upon the first Motion and Suggestions of Conscience. St. *Peter* fell, and his Fall was very shameful; but his Repentance was as surprizing and remarkable as his Fall. Whilst he was in the Height of his Rage for being suspected to be a Disciple of Christ, whilst he was abjuring him with Oaths and Imprecations, one Look of his Lord laid all the Storm, and melted him into the Tears and Sorrows of Repentance. The same Minute saw him the most audacious Sinner and the most humble Penitent; he

he committed the Fault, and begged Pardon for it, almost in the same Breath. There was no need of terrifying Judgments to awaken his Mind to a Sense of his Iniquity: The Eye of his Lord, though full of Compassion, was a sufficient Rebuke; it struck him with a Sorrow not to be dissembled, and therefore *he went out, and wept bitterly.* St. Peter's Case is the Case of every good Man under the same unhappy Circumstances. The hardened Sinner goes on from Sin to Sin, despises the Calls of Conscience, refuses to hearken to the Judgments of God, and obstinately perishes in the Error of his Way: But, where there is a Sense of Virtue and Religion, Sin can never keep Possession long; no sooner does the Passion cool, and Conscience begin to speak, but the Heart travails with Repentance, and feels the Pangs of godly Sorrow. How different were the Calls to Repentance which the Rulers of the *Jews* had upon the Death of Christ, and yet how different the Success of those Calls! When he hung upon the Cross, they saw all Nature thrown into Convulsions; the Earth trembled, the Sun was darkened, and the Vail of the Temple was rent in two: Yet still they pursue their Malice, and set a Guard upon his Sepulchre, hoping at least that the Grave, so assisted, would hold him fast: But when this failed them, and their own trusty Watch declared to them the Wonder of his Resurrection, they relented not; but, throwing off all Shame, they suborned the Guards to witness a Lye, giving out that his Disciples had stolen him away by Night. One compassionate Look recovered St. Peter; but the *Jews* were not convinced, though one arose from the Dead. A good Man may be mistaken, surprized, misled; but the first Return of Thought, the first Interval he has of cool Reflection, shews him his Error, and hastens his Return to the Obedience of Holiness.

Holiness. This is a great Security: For every Man may sin; but those only will repent, who sincerely endeavour after Righteousness. The Wicked, as they advance in Iniquity, do more and more subdue their Conscience, till even Repentance itself becomes impossible.

Fourthly, You may observe that the Sins of the best Men are expiated with the greatest Sense of Sorrow and Affliction. It is easy for Men, who have been long Strangers to a Sense of Religion, to argue themselves into an Unconcernedness for their past Iniquities; and to imagine that, if they do but pursue their Resolutions of living virtuously for the Time to come, it is of little Moment to trouble themselves with the Remembrance of what is past and gone; since God requires nothing but their Amendment, and even Sorrow and Repentance are no farther valuable, than as they tend to Reformation. I shall not enter into Speculations upon this Subject; let Men enjoy their Reasonings: But this I say, It is impossible to have a Sense of Religion, to think of God and ourselves as we ought to do, without being affected with the deepest Sorrow for our Offences. When Men are truly concerned, they do not consider what they are to get by their Tears; or what Profit their Sorrow will yield: The Soul must vent its Grief; and godly Sorrow is as truly the natural Expression of an inward Pain as worldly Sorrow, however they differ in their Causes and Objects. *St. Peter*, when he went out and wept bitterly, did not stay to consider whether he ought to weep or no; or to reflect what Use his Tears would be to him: His Heart was too full for such Reflections; he saw the Goodness of his Lord, and his own Baseness, and his Grief came as naturally into his Eyes, as when a Man bemoans the Loss of a Father or a Mother.

Some

Some indeed have learnt how to make a Trade of Repentance, and can balance Sin and Sorrow as exactly as a Merchant does his Accounts: And Repentance is indeed their richest Merchandize. But the Gospel has taught us no such Art: There only we learn how gracious our God is, how much it is our Duty and Interest to obey; and from thence we learn how base and how miserable we are, when we offend. What is beyond this is the Work of Nature, which will ever start and grow afflicted at the Sight of Misery, and knows how to lament its own Afflictions without a Guide. When therefore we find ourselves truly affected with the Sense of our Sins, and in good earnest lament our Disobedience and Ingratitude to God, we have the best Indication that we can have, that the Spirit of Religion is still alive within us, and that we are not given up to a reprobate obdurate Heart.

Lastly, There is one Observation of a more general Concern, that naturally offers itself upon the View of this Case: The Instruction of this Example to private Christians is very great; but yet there seems to me to be something more intended in the transmitting this History to all Ages in the sacred Writings.

The Gospel was the Work of God; and though we were to receive it by the Hands of Men, yet was our Faith to be founded, not in the Strength or Policy of Man, but in the Power and Wisdom of God: For this Reason *God chose the weak Things of the World to confound the strong.* The Disciples, upon whom the Weight of the Gospel was to rest, and upon whose Management the Success seemed to depend, were Men of no distinguished Characters; their Simplicity and Honesty were their best Commendation: These our Lord elected, well knowing, the weaker the Instruments were, the more evidently the Hand of God would

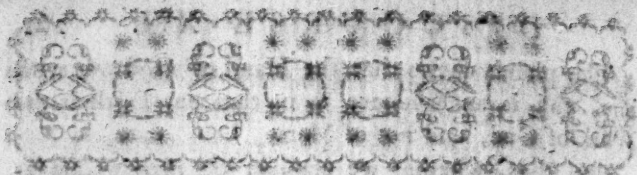
would appear in the mighty Things performed by them. Among these *St. Peter* plainly had the greatest Spirit, and the strongest Resolution; his Readiness and Vivacity distinguished him in every Step; he was the Mouth of the Apostles, and always ready to undertake and execute the Commands of his Lord. If there was any of the Number that could be thought capable of entering into and managing so great a Design as the Propagating a new Religion in the World, it was *St. Peter*: He therefore is called to the Trial. And how able he was of himself to encounter the Difficulties that were to attend the Gospel in every Step, you have already seen. Had the Gospel been left to have been conducted by him merely, it is probable that the Fame of it would not have reached our Times. And yet this same Man, not many Weeks after, appears before the Tribunal of the Magistrates, preaches to his Judges, and testifies that of a truth Jesus was the Christ, and that whom they slew, and hanged on a Tree, God had raised from the Dead, and exalted him to the right Hand of his Glory. Whence this mighty Difference? or to what can it be ascribed, but to that great Spirit, for whose Coming their Lord commanded them to wait in *Jerusalem*, and not to enter upon their Office till they should receive Power from on high? If the Gospel was an Imposture, and if Christ died to rise no more, what gave this fresh Courage to *St. Peter*? Had he more Confidence in a dead Man, than in his Master whilst on Earth? If he had not seen Christ come from the Grave, nor received the Power of the Spirit, what could move him to expose himself for the sake of Christ, for whose sake whilst on Earth, and whilst the Hopes of his being the Son of God were strong, he dared not to expose himself?

This

This plainly shews that the Hand of God was with him, and is an Evidence to us that our Faith is the Work of God, and not of Man.

And thus, whether we consider St. *Peter's* Case as an Instruction to ourselves, it affords us many useful Lessons and many Encouragements to direct and support us in our spiritual Warfare; or whether we consider it in a more general View, and as affecting his Character as he was a Minister of the Gospel, and an Apostle of Christ Jesus, it yields us a great Assurance and Confidence in our Faith, whilst through the Weakness of the Man we evidently discern the Power of God, which wrought effectually with him; so that, knowing in whom we have trusted, we need not be ashamed.





DISCOURSE XVII.

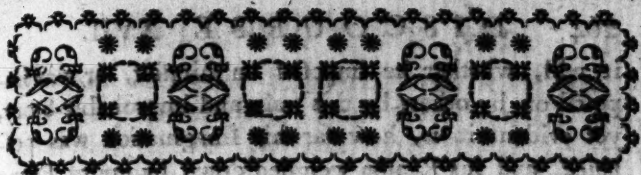


MATTHEW XIX. 1. 2.

And Jesus said unto the Pharisees, Ye say, That it is lawful for a man to put away his wife, because of the hardness of their hearts; but what say ye to me?

Whether the Temple was not sanctified by Herod himself, or not, is not now the question. The Account given of it by St. Matthew and St. Luke make it probable, that Herod was the first who supposed it to be that John Baptist, who the Dead, whom he had cruelly and unrightly put to Death in Prison. St. Luke's Account makes the Case rather to be, that the Jewish Reports and Opinions of others concerning him, either that he was Elias, or one of the old Prophets, or John the Baptist, from the Dead, were brought to Herod, and that he was to give him a Kingdom and Honour about them. But it is

DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE XVII.



MATTHEW XIV. 1, 2.

At that Time Herod the Tetrarch heard of the Fame of Jesus, and said unto his Servants, This is John the Baptist, he is risen from the Dead, and therefore mighty Works do shew forth themselves in him.

W HETHER this Thought was first started by Herod himself, or no, is not very certain: The Accounts given of it by St. Matthew and St. Mark make it probable, that Herod was the first who supposed Jesus to be that *John Baptist* risen from the Dead, whom he had cruelly and wantonly put to Death in Prison. St. Luke's Account makes the Case rather to be, that the several Reports and Opinions of others concerning Jesus, either that he was *Elias*, or one of the old Prophets, or *John the Baptist* from the Dead, were brought to Herod, and that he was in great Perplexity and Concern about them. But be this as it

it will, whether he imposed on himself, or was imposed on by others by this vain and improbable Story, yet evident it is, how far his Imagination was possessed, and his Reason weighed down by guilty Fear; and how easily he believed whatever seemed to threaten that Punishment, which his Conscience told him was his Due. How came it to pass, that, whilst others were blessing themselves with the Hopes of having a great Prophet among them, *Herod* alone was perplexed and dismayed? or, when there were such various Accounts of this Person, some saying that he was *Elias*, others that he was one of the old Prophets, and others that he was *John the Baptist*, how came *Herod* to take up with the most improbable Account of all, and for which there was not the least Foundation? The *Jews* had from ancient Prophecies, however mistaken, an Expectation that *Elias* should come, or some of the old Prophets; and those who were of that Opinion were in the common Error, which was countenanced by Tradition, and the prevailing Interpretation of the Prophecies. To their Expectation the Character and Person of our Blessed Saviour did very well answer; He was a Preacher of Righteousness, and mighty in Signs and Wonders: Such was *Elias*, such were the old Prophets: They had read of them, what they now saw performed by Jesus; and, their Persuasion being allowed them, that *Elias*, or one of the old Prophets should come, the Words and Works of Jesus tended extremely to confirm them in the Opinion that he was the Person whom they expected. But with respect to *John the Baptist* the Case is quite otherwise; there was no Ground to build this Imagination on; there was neither Tradition nor Prophecy to support it: *John* indeed was a just Man, and a Preacher of Righteous-

ness,

ness, and had been barbarously murdered; and so had many before him, who never returned again from their Graves, and what better Reason was there to expect that he should? Besides, suppose it probable that he was to come, yet still it was improbable that this was the Person: Their Characters and Offices were very different; *John* went about baptizing, but we are told expressly that Jesus baptized no Man: Jesus wrought many Miracles, but of *John* it is recorded in holy Writ that he wrought no Miracle. But *Herod* minded none of these Things; he had a Motive that weighed more with him on the other Side, a Motive which shut out all Reason and Argument: It was his guilty Conscience told him this was *John the Baptist*. He had murdered the holy Man, to please a lewd Woman; and no sooner did he hear that there was one in the Country who wrought Miracles, but he concluded the *Baptist* was come from the Grave, armed with Power to take Vengeance for his Iniquities, and his own Wrongs. *This is John the Baptist, says Herod: He is risen from the Dead, and therefore mighty Works do shew forth themselves in him.*

The Use I intend to make of this Passage of holy Scripture is to set before you such Considerations as naturally arise from it, and are proper for the Government and Direction of ourselves. And,

First, You may observe from hence the great Force and Efficacy of Conscience.

It is reasonable to suppose, that if God intended Men for his own Service, and designed them for another State of Happiness and Misery after this Life, according to their good or ill Behaviour in it, that he should make himself known to them by some clear and plain Manifestation; and promulge the Laws,

which were to be the Rule of their Obedience, in such Manner that all should know and acknowledge their Duty. Were Men left destitute of these necessary Assistances, there could be no Equity in requiring Obedience, no Justice in punishing Disobedience. There are many Demonstrations to be had of the Existence of a Deity from the Works of Nature, and from the Operations of our own Minds : But the plainest of these Proofs do sometimes escape the lower Part of Mankind, who, being constantly taken up in the servile Employments of Life, do not exercise their Reason so far as to come to the Conclusion, which is but one Remove distant from the Objects they every Day converse with. And though, as the Psalmist speaks, *The Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy Work ; though Day unto Day uttereth Speech, and Night unto Night sheweth Knowledge ;* yet some there are, who, for want of Attention, hear not this still Voice of Nature, and are slow to apprehend the Glory which the Heavens declare, or to discover the Hand of the Creator in the Works of the Firmament which they every Day behold. But then there is an internal Proof of a Deity arising from Conscience, and the Reflection of the Mind upon the Good or Evil we do, which amounts to the fullest Declaration of the Power of God, and is the completest Promulgation of his Law to Mankind that can be desired or expected. In all civil Cases a King is sufficiently proclaimed, and a Law is sufficiently promulged, when either is done according to Custom in some public and solemn Manner ; for, it being impossible to give every Man concerned particular Notice, the Necessity of the Case requires that every Man should at his Peril take Notice of the public Declaration. But, with respect to the Authority of God,
and

and the common Laws of Morality, such Care is taken, that the Promulgation is made at every Man's own Door, nay, in his very Heart. The Sense which Men have of Good and Evil, the Hopes and Fears which naturally arise in consequence of the Good or Ill they do, are such Demonstrations, and so homely applied to every Man's Understanding, of the Obedience owing to a superior Being, that nothing can invalidate.

As Speculation helps us to other Proofs of the Power and Authority of our Maker, so does it help some also to get rid of them. It is an easy Matter for a Man of a subtle Wit to refine so far on any Subject, till there shall be hardly any thing left for the Mind to rest on with Satisfaction and Assurance. But this Proof of a superior Being, to whom we are accountable, which dwells in every Man's Breast, no Art or Subtilty can ever expel. As long as Men continue to judge of the Good and Evil of their Actions, as long as such Reflections are attended in the Innocent with Peace and Satisfaction of Mind, and in the Guilty with Fear and Anxiety; so long it will be plain that God hath not left himself without Witness, but that there are as many Evidences of his Power and Authority as there are rational Beings in the World: And there is this peculiar to this Evidence, that it is strongest and most irresistible in those who in Interest are most concerned to suppress it. The Innocent have little Temptation to plead to the Jurisdiction of the Court; they are the Guilty who want that and other Artifices to decline the Power of the Judge: But, in the present Case, the Fears which surround the Guilty are so many undoubted Proofs and Records of the Judge's Authority; and his Mind, conscious of all those Fears,

Speak to him in the Language which *Festus* used to *St. Paul*; *Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go.*

Secondly, In the same Manner the Moral Law is promulged to every rational Creature: The Work of the Law is written in the Heart, as the Conscience beareth Witness, and the Thoughts, which either accuse or excuse. The Promulgation, in this Case, is stronger than that of any human Laws, which, how publickly and solemnly soever they are declared at first, are often worn out by Length of Time, or grow dark and obscure, and stand in Need of an authoritative Exposition to silence the Contentions arising from the different Acceptations of the Rule. But here the Law is renewed to every Man, and the Sense and Meaning of it so preserved, that nothing but great Ability and Skill, joined with little Honesty, can pervert or obscure it; and then only for a Time; since the Rebukes of Conscience will sooner or later restore the true Sense to the Law, which was darkened by the Shades of false Reason serving the Inclinations of a corrupted Heart. It would grieve an honest Man to see how the plainest Laws have been treated by corrupt Casuists, who, to serve the vile Purposes of themselves or others, have made the Commandment of God of none Effect by their Traditions; who have played Rule against Rule, and Duty against Duty, till both have been lost. This might be shewn in every Case, but in none more apparently than in the Instance which the Text furnishes of the Obligation of an Oath, which is made to bind, or not to bind, just as the corrupt Purposes require. But though these Daubings with untempered Mortar serve often to deceive the Simple, and to hide their plain Duty from their Eyes; yet
when

when they come to reflect coolly upon their past Actions, Conscience proves a far honestest Casuist, and pulls off the thin Disguise; and the Man trembles at the Remembrance of those very Things which he committed under the Pretence of a religious Care and Disposition. *Herod*, it seems, had promised with an Oath to give the Daughter of *Herodias* whatsoever she would ask; and though he was troubled when she demanded the Head of *John the Baptist*, yet, as it is particularly remarked by the Evangelist, *for his Oath's sake, and them which sat with him at Meat, he commanded it to be given her.* Happy Hypocrite! how serenely does he dip his Hands in guiltless Blood, and how calmly does he sit under the Comfort of a conscientious Regard to his Oath! But see, the Scene is quickly changed, *Herod* is alarmed with the Fame of one who wrought Miracles in the Country: He starts at the News; he cries out, *This is John the Baptist, he is risen from the Dead.* This Sense of Good and Evil, which is natural to rational Minds, and is thus guarded against false and corrupt Interpretations by the Power of Conscience, is a great Justification of the Goodness and Equity of God, in taking Care to promulge his Laws sufficiently to all who are bound to obey them, and to make their Duty clear and evident to them; without which we should not be able to discern him to be the righteous Judge of the World, in which Character we are chiefly concerned to know him.

Thirdly, We may observe from hence, what Care the wise Author of our Nature has taken, not only to manifest himself and his Laws to us, but likewise to secure our Obedience, and thereby our eternal Happiness and Welfare. It is thought a great Dis-

advantage to Religion, that it has only such distant Hopes and Fears to support it; and it is true, that the great Objects of our Hopes and Fears are placed on the other Side the Grave, whilst the Temptations to Sin meet us in every Turn, and are almost constantly present with us. But then, to balance this, it must be considered, that though the Punishments and Rewards of Religion are at such a Distance, yet the Hopes and Fears are always present, and influence the Happiness of our Lives here, as much, and often much more, than any other Good or Evil which can befall us. The Peace of Mind which flows from doing right, the Fear, the Anxiety, the Torments which attend the Guilty, will inevitably determine the Condition of Men to Happiness or Misery even in this Life. And no Man, whatever his present Contempt for Religion may be, can be secure that he is not by his Wickedness drawing down on himself the greatest Misery that Man is capable of sustaining. As little as you think now of the Consequence of your Iniquity, a very little Time, or a very trivial Accident, may open the Passage to other Reflections. The Sons of Jacob had no Remorse, when they sold their Brother to be a Slave; they had delivered themselves from a foolish Fear they had entertained, that he would one Day be greater than they, and their Case was much mended by the Riddance they had of him: But the very first Misfortune that befel them, a little rough Usage in a strange Country, awakened their guilty Fears, and they said one to another, *We are verily guilty concerning our Brother, in that we saw the Anguish of his Soul when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this Distress come upon us.* Misfortunes may befall the Good as well as

the

the Evil, for righteous Men have no Promise to secure them in this Life against the common Calamities incident to it; but then, under the same Circumstances, there is a mighty Difference in their Sufferings, arising from the different Reflections their several Cases afford. The innocent Man, who finds nothing to charge himself with as the Cause of his Calamity, submits to it as to an Accident of Life, to which he always knew himself subject, or as a Dispensation of the Providence of God towards him, whose Kindness he has no Reason to mistrust: But when any Calamity overtakes the Sinner, and setting aside at present what his Sins may deserve, even as a Man he is subject to the Casualties of Life; and, whenever they overtake him, will it be possible for him to think that they are not the Punishment of those Sins which, he is conscious, have deserved them? And what Weight must this add to his Woe? how tormenting must the Thought be, that all his Sufferings are Effects of God's Wrath, and the Presage of greater Woe to come? Innocence may sometimes steal a Man from the Sense of his Pain, and his Peace of Mind make him forget the Sorrow and Affliction of his Heart: But Guilt has no resting Place; it raises every Faculty of the Soul to increase the present Misery. How does the Memory of what is past, and the Fear of what is to come, give an Edge and Sharpness to Affliction? How does the Imagination work to paint in all the Colours of Terror the sad Doom that is expected? It is this only that renders the Afflictions of Life truly insupportable; for *the Spirit of a Man will sustain his Infirmary, but a wounded Spirit who can bear?* So that, if we consider the Case fairly, we shall find, that though the final Reward of Virtue, and Punishment of Vice, are reserved to another Time

and Place; yet there are such Rewards and Punishments annexed to them here, and which have their Foundation in the very Frame and Constitution of our Minds, as are sufficient to determine the Choice of a wife or reasonable Man. And if some, who pretend to Doubts and Uncertainties concerning a future State, are serious, let them consider, whether that Defect, as they suppose, in the Foundation of Religion be not supplied by what we now speak of: For, were they ever so certain of a future State, their Duty would consist in those very Things which their own Reason requires of them, and which are absolutely necessary to the Peace of their Minds, upon which all their Happiness depends. Allow them then their Doubts, will the Consequence be, that they may safely go contrary to their own Reason, and the Measures of their present Happiness? How then does this Uncertainty affect the Practice of Virtue, since the Certainty requires nothing of us but what our Reason and present Interest will teach us without it? And this shews how effectually God has laid before us the Knowledge of his Law, together with proper and sufficient Motives to secure our Obedience.

To conclude then: As you value the Use of that Reason which distinguishes you from the Creatures of a lower Rank, as you value the Comforts of this Life, and the Glories of the next (and, if these Arguments will not weigh, there is nothing more to add) take heed to preserve Innocence and Virtue, which fill up the Character of that Godliness, which the Apostle tells us, *is great Gain, having the Promise of this Life, and of that which is to come.*

DISCOURSE XVIII.

ROMANS vi. 21.

What Fruit had ye then in those Things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the End of those Things is Death.

ALTHOUGH the Hopes introduced by the Gospel of Christ are in themselves fitted to support and encourage Virtue and true Religion, and are only to be truly enjoyed by those who make a Title to them by the Innocency of their Lives; yet they have been perverted to very ill Purposes by such as, hating to be reformed by the Precepts of the Gospel, are willing nevertheless to put their Sins under the Protection of the glorious Promises contained in it. This Policy prevailed so soon in the Church, that we find the Apostle stating the Pretence, and rejecting it with Indignation, in the first Verses of this Chapter: *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in Sin, that Grace may abound? God forbid! How shall*

shall we that are dead to Sin live any longer therein? In the Chapter before this of the Text, he sets forth the exceeding great Benefits we receive through Jesus Christ: That being justified by Faith, we have Peace with God. That God commendeth his Love towards us, in that while we were yet Sinners Christ died for us. That being justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from Wrath thro' him. That as by one Man's Disobedience many were made Sinners; so by the Obedience of one shall many be made righteous. To prevent the Use which ill-disposed Men were ready to make of this great Goodness of God towards Sinners, imagining their Iniquities to be privileged, since so much Grace had been extended to them, the Apostle in this Chapter enters into the Question, Whether the Hopes of the Gospel are reconcileable to a Continuance in Sin; and shews by many Arguments, drawn from the Profession, the State, and the Condition of a Christian, that a State of Grace and a State of Sin are as inconsistent as Life and Death: since every Christian is buried with Christ by Baptism into Death; that, like as Christ was raised up from the Dead by the Glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in Newness of Life. From these Reasons he proceeds to others, not of less Moment, appealing to the Sense of Conscience and the Voice of Reason against the presumptuous Conceit which made the Son of God the Minister of Sin, and the Gospel to give countenance to the Iniquities of which Nature was ever ashamed, and against which the common Reason of Mankind had passed Sentence of Condemnation: *What Fruit had ye then in those Things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the End of those Things is Death.*

These Words will suggest to our Consideration the following Particulars:

First,

First, That the Shame and Remorse which attend upon Sin and Guilt arise from the natural Impressions on the Mind of Man.

Secondly, That the Expectation of Punishment for Sin is the Result of the Reason given unto us.

Thirdly, That these common Notions are the Foundation of all Religion, and therefore must be supposed and admitted in Revealed Religion, and cannot be contradicted by it.

First, That the Shame and Remorse which attend upon Sin and Guilt arise from the natural Impressions on the Mind of Man.

It is certain from Experience that we can no more direct by our Choice the Sensations of our Mind, than we can those of the Body: When the Fire burns, Flesh and Blood must feel Pain; and a rational Mind compelled to act against its own Conviction must ever grieve and be afflicted. These natural Connections are unalterably fixed by the Author of Nature, and established to be Means of our Preservation. We are taught by the Sense of Pain to avoid Things hurtful or destructive to the Body; and the Torments and Anxiety of Mind, which follow so close and so constantly at the Heels of Sin and Guilt, are placed as Guardians to our Innocence, as Centinels to give early Notice of the Approach of Evil, which threatens the Peace and Comfort of our Lives. If we are perfect Masters of the Sensations of our Mind, if Reflection be so much under Command, that when we say, Come, it cometh, when we say, Go, it goeth, how is it that so many suffer so much from the uneasy Thoughts and Suggestions of their own Hearts, when they need only speak the Word and be whole? Whence the Self-conviction, the Self-condemnation of Sinners, whence the foreboding Thoughts of Judgment to come, the sad Expectations

of divine Vengeance, and the Dread of future Misery, if the Sinner has it in his Power to bid these melancholy Thoughts retire, and can when he pleases sit down enjoying his Iniquities in Peace and Tranquillity?

These Considerations make it evident, that the Pain and Grief of Mind which we suffer from a Sense of having done ill, flow from the very Constitution of our Nature, as we are rational Agents. Nor can we conceive a greater Argument of God's utter Irreconcilableness to Sin, than that he has given us such a Nature that we can never be reconciled to it ourselves. We never like it in others where we have no Interest in the Iniquity, nor long approve of it in ourselves when we have. The Hours of cool Reflection are the Sinner's Mortification, for Vice can never be happy in the Company of Reason; which is the true Cause why profligate Sinners fly to any Excess that may help them to forget themselves, and hide them from the Light of Reason, which, whenever it ceases to be the Glory of a Man, will necessarily become his Shame and Reproach. No Vice is the better for being found in the Company of Intemperance, but becomes more odious in the Sight of God and Man. And yet how often does Vice fly to Intemperance for Refuge? which shews what miserable Company Sinners are to themselves, when they can be content to expose themselves to the Contempt of all about them, merely for the sake of being free from their own Censure for a Season. Were it in the Power of Men to find any Expedient to reconcile their Reason to their Vices, they would not submit to the hard Terms of parting with their Reason for the sake of being at ease with their Vices. But there is no Remedy; as long as we have the Power of thinking, so long must we think ill of ourselves when we do ill. The only Cure for this Uneasiness is to
live

live without Thought; for we can never enjoy the Happiness of a Brute, till we have sunk ourselves into the same Degree of Understanding.

It may be said, I know, that there have been some profligate Sinners who have discovered no Uneasiness upon the Account of their Guilt, but have gone through a Life of prosperous Wickedness with great Shew of outward Peace and Tranquillity: I know too, that there have been Instances of Men who could play with Fire, and be very familiar with it, without shewing any Sense of Pain: But neither will the Art of one be accepted as an Argument against the Sense of Feeling, nor the Obdurateness of the other be admitted as a Proof against the natural Sense of a rational Mind. Great wicked Men are often lost in a perpetual Succession of Business and Pleasure, and have no Respite for Reflection. The poor idle Sinner seeks Ease in Intemperance; the more prosperous is kept at an unhappy Distance from himself by living in a Croud, and having his Hours filled up with Business, Ceremony, or Pleasure; and both equally live, with respect to themselves and their own Condition, in one continued Lethargy. But such Instances as these are of no Consequence in determining the general Case of Mankind; especially considering that even these are laying up in store for themselves sad Materials for Reflection, whenever the Season of Reflection overtakes them; and that, should they ever be deserted by Business and Pleasures, instead of being Objections to the general Sense of Mankind under the Terrors of Guilt, they may seem to be the most miserable Examples of it. These Observations will receive an additional Strength by considering,

Secondly,

Secondly, That the Expectation of Punishment for Sin is the Result of the Reason given unto us. *The End of those Things is Death.*

There are no certain Principles from which we can infer the Nature and Sort of Punishment designed by God for Sinners; and as Reason has left us in the Dark in this Particular, so neither has Revelation clearly discovered this Secret of Providence. The Representations of Scripture upon this Head are metaphorical; the Images are strong and lively, full of Horror and Dread, and lead us to this certain Conclusion, That endless Misery will be the Lot of the Unrighteous: But they do not lead us to a Solution of all the Inquiries which an inquisitive Mind may raise upon this Occasion. We read of the *Fire that never goes out*, of the *Worm that never dies*, both prepared to prey upon the Wicked to all Eternity: But what this Fire is, what this Worm is, that shall for ever torment, and never destroy the Wicked, we are no-where informed.

Among the antient Heathens we find Variety of Opinions, or, to speak more properly, of Imaginations, upon this Subject; and tho' none of them can make any Proof in their own behalf, yet they all prove the common Ground upon which they stand, The natural Expectation of future Punishment for Iniquity. The Atheistical Writers of Antiquity entertain themselves with exposing the vulgar Opinions of their Time; and the Unbelievers of our Time have trodden in their Steps, and pleased themselves mightily with dressing up the various and uncertain Imaginations of Men upon this Subject. But what is this to the great Point? If Nature has rightly instructed us in teaching us to expect Punishment for our Sins, what signifies it how far Men have been mistaken in determining the Kinds of Punishment that are in Reserve for Sinners? Let the

Learning of the *Egyptians* pass for Superstition, and the Wisdom of the *Greeks* for Folly; yet what has the Sense of Nature to do with them, which teaches us to expect Punishment for Sin from the Hand that made us? And when once the Time comes in which that Hand shall exert itself, this we may be sure of, that the Sinner will find no farther Subject for Laughter and Diversion. Men think they gain a great Point by bringing plausible Reasons against the common Notions of future Punishment: But suppose these Notions to be indeed Mistakes, yet if it remains certain from the Light of Reason, as well as of Revelation, that God will punish Sin, what does the Cause gain by this Argument? Will you suppose that God intends to punish Wickedness, and yet that he has no possible Way to do it? Where lies the Defect? Is it Want of Wisdom to contrive proper Means for the Punishment of Sin, or is it Want of Power to put them in Execution? If he wants neither the one nor the other, we have nothing to inquire after in this Case, but, What his Will is; and of that he has given us such Evidence, that we can never lose Sight of it as long as we continue to be reasonable Creatures.

The Power of Conscience which every Man feels in himself, the Fear that pursues every Sin, that haunts the most secret and most successful Offenders, are great Evidences of the common Expectation of a Judgment to come. For why does the Sinner fear, whom no Man suspects? Why does he sit joyless over the Gains of his Iniquity, whilst all around him are congratulating his Prosperity, and know nothing of the dark Contrivances by which he obtained it? What is that Spirit in Man, and how instructed, that can bear up against natural Evils and Infirmities, but sinks under the Wounds of Conscience, the Grief of which no Medi-

cine

cine can assuage, the Torment of which no Courage can endure? But I need not press the Argument any farther, the Fact is not disputed: It is allowed on all Hands, that there is a general Expectation of future Judgment; but this, we are told, is the Effect of Weakness and Superstition, and of Fear where there is no Cause of Fear: The Question then is, Whether this common Sense of Nature is derived from Weakness and Infirmary of Mind, or is indeed the Result of right Reason.

Now, if the Opinion that prevails in the World, that Sin shall be punished, is the mere Effect of Weakness and Superstition, the Opinion advanced in direct Opposition to it must needs be well founded, and capable of being supported by good Reasons. Let us hear then what Reason can be offered in Support of the opposite Opinion, That Sin shall not be punished. Now, whatever can be said in maintenance of this Assertion must resolve itself into one or other of these Propositions; either, That Sin does not deserve to be punished; or, That God has no Means of punishing it.

As to the first, No one has yet been found to be an Advocate for Wickedness: Even those who seem unwilling to admit a State of future Rewards and Punishments, have never, that I know, made Use of this Plea; That Sin deserves no Punishment: On the contrary, the only Reason why they think Sin will not be punished hereafter, is, Because they have no Notion of any State after this: Could they be persuaded of this, they would not want to be told what the Fate of Sinners must be in another World: And it is worth observing, that all, who believe another State after Death, agree in believing that Sin shall be punished in it; and that all, who hope to escape Punishment for their Sins, hope utterly to be destroyed by Death, and never

to see Life again : So that, as to the Merit of Sin, there is but one Opinion among Men, that it deserves to be punished, though some persuade themselves there is no Place in which it can be punished.

It being supposed then, that this Proposition, Sin deserves to be punished, is a Maxim agreed by the common Reason of Mankind ; it is evidently a Reason leading to this Conclusion, That Sin shall be punished. For what Reason can be assigned why that should not be done, which our Reason tells us is fit to be done ? What should move God to act contrary to that which he himself has shewn us to be proper, and becoming his Wisdom and Justice, by the Light of that Reason with which he has endowed us ? What can be said to justify him in informing our Judgments that Sin ought to be punished, if he has determined in his own Mind never to punish it ? It must be great Want of Power or Justice in God not to punish Iniquity, after he has so strongly declared to every Man's Understanding the Fitness of doing it.

Let us then consider the latter Proposition, and see, Whether God has any Means of punishing Sin. And it is upon this Proposition that all the Hopes of Impunity are built : Not that all who hope for Impunity are so absurd as to suppose that God wants Power to punish the Wicked, if he thinks fit to do it : But they do suppose, That, by his Purpose in the Creation of Man, Man has no Relation to any State of Being but in this Life only ; that when he dies, all his Hopes and Fears die with him ; and that he is no farther capable of any Sense, either of Pleasure or of Pain.

But by what Principles of Reason are Men led into this Supposition ? That God might have provided another State after this, and ordained Men to live in it, either happily or miserably according to their Deserts,

no one can doubt, who does not doubt of the Being of a God. If he has ordered it otherwise, it was because it seemed best to his Wisdom: But how could it seem best to his Wisdom to leave no Means for making a Distinction between Virtue and Vice, by a suitable Distribution of Rewards and Punishments, and yet to teach us, by that Reason which he has given us, that it is highly suitable to his Wisdom and Justice to make such Distinction? That he does not make the Distinction in this World, is evident to Eye-sight: We see the Wicked flourish and prosper, and the Righteous struggling with Sorrows and Afflictions; of one Sort many live to a good old Age, and no Harm happeneth unto them; of the other Sort many die in the Flower of their Youth, and go down to the Grave in Sorrow: And if after this Scene nothing remains, then is there no Justice with the Most High; the Wicked have the Advantage, and the Righteous has just Cause of complaining, that *he cleansed his Heart in vain, and washed his Hands in Innocence*. But can this be agreeable to his Wisdom, who Himself has taught us to think it disagreeable to all the Rules of Wisdom and Justice? Is it possible to suppose that a God of Truth and Justice should teach us those Lessons of Justice which he never intended to fulfil? that he should train us up in the Expectation of Rewards and Punishments, and purpose never to dispense them? If this be, as it is, very absurd, the Consequence must be, that *he has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness, and give to every Man according to his Works*. You see then that the common Sense and Expectation of Mankind, with respect to the Rewards and Punishments of another Life, is so far from being the Effect of Weakness and Superstition, that it is the immediate Result of that Reason which

God.

God has given us: So strong a Result is it from our Reason, that it is not possible to justify God and the Methods of his Providence by the Reason which he has given us, without maintaining the Certainty of a future State, in which Sin shall be punished, and Righteousness rewarded.

Those of a contrary Opinion may have perhaps some Notion of an overruling Fate and Necessity, to which all Things are subject; or, if they go farther, and conceive that there is a rational Being at the Head of Nature, who is Author and Governor of all Things, yet can they hardly allow him any thing but Will, and Power, and Understanding; for moral Attributes can never be discovered in the Deity by those who leave no Room for the Exercise of them, or rather who introduce a Sort of Government into the World inconsistent with all moral Attributes and Perfections. We are most certainly, if we can judge any thing from our own Feeling and Consciousness, accountable Creatures; all our Notions of Right and Wrong, of Justice and Equity, all our Thoughts, Reflections, and Forebodings of Mind conspire to fix the Expectation upon us, that one Day we must give Account of ourselves and our Doings. Our natural Notions of God point out to us our Judge; on our own Part we find Reason and Freedom, which makes us fit Subjects of Judgment; on the Part of God we find Wisdom, and Mercy, and Justice, and every other Perfection that may adorn the Judge of the Universe: And if, after all, we are not to be judged, there must be something very wrong in these Notions of Mankind. We cannot be mistaken in those relating to ourselves, those we feel to be true: The Mistake then must be charged on our Notions of the Deity, and we must cease to think Him a moral Agent, at whose Hands no Justice is to be expected:

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We must cease to think Him good, who has tormented us in vain with the Fears of Eternity, and deluded us with false Hopes of a better Life; but has not Himself so much Regard to Virtue or Vice as to answer either our Hopes or our Fears. Judge now whether the Expectations of Eternity are the Dreams of Superstition, or the necessary Result of Thought and Reason. But we have one Step more to take, and to shew,

Thirdly, That these common Notions are the Foundation of all Religion, and therefore must be supposed and admitted in Revealed Religion, and cannot be contradicted by it.

Some there have been, who, finding no Hopes for Impunity to Sinners under the Light of Reason and Nature, have taken Shelter in Revelation; not desiring to correct and reform their Vices, but to enjoy them, and yet to hide them from the Wrath to come. These are great Extollers of the Mercy and Goodness of God displayed in the Gospel, great Assertors of the extensive and unbounded Merits of the Blood of Christ; so far as to think it a Reproach to their Saviour for any one to teach, that the Hopes of Christians may be destroyed for Sin, since Christ has died to make an Atonement for it. Such as these are much pleased with the Thought, that they do great Honour to God, by opening to the World the inexhaustible Treasures of his Mercy, the Attribute in which he delights; and think they have some Merit and Service to plead on Account of such pious Labour. They imagine they pay great Regard to our Redeemer, and are the only true Believers in the Efficacy of his Death; the Virtue of which was so great as to draw out the Sting of Sin, and leave all the Pleasures of it behind to be enjoyed by the World.

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But would these Men consider, they would find that they are offering up to God the Sacrifice of Fools, whilst they divest him of Wisdom and Justice, and all other moral Attributes, in Compliment to his Mercy; and represent him to the World as a good-natured, indolent, inactive Being, unconcerned at what passes among his Creatures, and prepared to receive to equal Degrees of Favour the Righteous and the Sinner. The Image of such a Being as this carries with it no Terror like to that which arises from the Character of a Tyrant and Oppressor, and therefore does not equally shock the Minds of Men: But if we examine to the Bottom, such a Being is as void of Morality as a Tyrant. For Morality consists in a just Distinction of Good and Evil, and in treating both according to the Rules of Equity: But he who is equally good to the Righteous and the Unrighteous, makes as little Distinction between them, as he who is equally severe to both. One is a good-natured, immoral Being, the other a cruel one, but both equally void of Justice and Morality. This is the Honour done to God by ascribing to him a blind Mercy, that knows no Distinction between the Good and the Evil. And like to it is the Honour done to our Blessed Redeemer by the forementioned Doctrines, which do in Truth make the Son of God to be the Minister of Sin, and establish the Kingdom of Darkness upon the Merits of the Death of Christ.

It is beside my present Purpose to shew, how inconsistent these Notions are with the true Doctrine of the Gospel; and yet I cannot satisfy myself without observing, that all the Precepts, all the Representations of Scripture, all the Hopes and Fears proposed to Christians, teach us another Lesson, and confirm to us this great Article of all Religion, *That God hath appointed*

appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness.

This is the Gospel Doctrine; nor can a true Revelation possibly teach otherwise, for God cannot contradict himself, nor gainsay by his Prophets that common Light of Reason which he has planted in Men to be their Guide and Director. Natural Religion is the Foundation and Support of Revelation, which may supply the Defects of Nature, but can never overthrow the established Principles of it; which may cast new Light upon the Dictates of Reason, but can never contradict them. I cannot listen to Revelation but in consequence of the natural Notion I have of God, of his Being, his Wisdom, Power, and Goodness: Destroy then the Principles of Reason, and there is no room left for Revelation. I see and feel the Difference between Good and Evil, Virtue and Vice: What Spirit must that be which teaches me that there is no such Difference? Shall I believe it to be a Spirit come from God, when I know that the Spirit he has placed within me speaks the contrary? In which Case there is only this Choice, either to disown God for my Creator, or to reject the Spirit which contradicts the Law of my Creation, and the Light of Reason which God has placed in the Minds of Men.

From this Way of Reasoning then it is evident, that, if the Expectation of Rewards and Punishments for Virtue and Vice is the Result of Reason, and of the common Light of Nature, it is impossible that it should be superseded by any Revelation: For if God has taught the World that Sin deserves to be punished, can he be so inconsistent as to teach the contrary? or to assure us, that although it be highly becoming his Wisdom and Justice to punish Sin, yet he means to have no Regard to Wisdom and Justice, but to let

Sin

Sin go unpunished? He might as well teach us that he has no Wisdom and Justice, and then we should be soon agreed what Regard ought to be paid to his Revelation.

The Conclusion of the whole is, That without Holiness no Man shall see God; that Christ has, by redeeming us from Sin itself, and sanctifying us to be an elect People peculiar to God, redeemed us from the Punishment of Sin: If we refuse the Redemption from Sin, we shall never partake in the Redemption from the Punishment of it. All the Arts and Contrivances of Men to atone for their Sins without forsaking them, are Affronts to God, Contradictions to Reason, and such as would effectually overthrow the Credit of any Revelation which should profess them, but cannot possibly be supported by any; and, in fact, are utterly inconsistent with the Doctrine of the Gospel.

Let us remember then, That *he only is righteous who doth righteousness*; that those only shall be truly happy who shall do the Works of God; whilst the Hopes and Confidence of those who lay great Claim to the Merits of Christ, but seek not after the Righteousness of Christ, shall in the End be vain and delusive: For the Word of the Lord shall stand, and be confirmed at the great Day: *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven.*

F I N I S.